# ELECTION 1989: THE ABORTION ISSUE IN NEW JERSEY AND VIRGINIA

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# ELECTION 1989: THE ABORTION ISSUE IN NEW JERSEY AND VIRGINIA

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# HIGHLIGHTS

## INTRODUCTION

- The Supreme Court's decision in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* gave states greater freedom to set abortion policy and set off a war between pro-choice and pro-life forces that is being waged across the nation in statehouses and at the ballot box.

- New Jersey and Virginia were the first two states to hold gubernatorial and legislative elections following *Webster*.

- This report weaves together information provided by voters, candidates, and activists to analyze whether and how the abortion issue played a role in the two states' elections and to assess how the abortion issue may affect the 1990 general elections.

## CHAPTER 1: THE CAMPAIGN CONTEXT

- In both states, the potential was high for the abortion issue to be important since many voters rated this as generally a very important political issue. This potential for abortion to become an election issue seemed to benefit the pro-choice side. On a "pro-life/pro-choice index" based on answers to seven questions, majorities of those polled in each state gave a majority of pro-choice responses.

- General concern for the issue did not guarantee issue-influenced voting on election day. While voters said they would not support a candidate who differed with them on the issue, voters in both states ranked other issues as more important in general. Thus, how the candidates dealt with it in the campaigns would determine whether the issue would be decisive or merely a footnote in the history books.

- Women saw the abortion issue as more important than men did, regardless of where they stood on the issue.

- Opposition to new restrictions was highest among voters under 50, but age was less important than gender in determining the weight voters attached to the issue.

- College graduates were more likely than less highly-educated voters to oppose new restrictions, but education had no impact on the general importance of the issue.
- Pro-choice Republicans saw the issue as less important than did pro-life Republicans; Democrats on both sides of the issue saw it as equally important.
- Voters viewed pro-choice groups more favorably than pro-life groups.
- Candidates and campaign activists believe that the Supreme Court's *Webster* decision and the extensive media attention it garnered galvanized public interest on the issue.

## CHAPTER 2: THE GUBERNATORIAL RACES

- The *Webster* decision increased the likelihood that the abortion issue would affect the 1989 elections because it changed the political climate. The abortion issue affected campaign dynamics and voting decisions.
- The abortion issue affected the campaign agendas, and this was detrimental to the Courter and Coleman campaigns because they could not control the issue agenda.
- Activity by pro-life and newly resurgent pro-choice groups also affected the campaign messages communicated to voters.
- Stronger campaign emphasis on the issue in Virginia than in New Jersey may explain why almost two out of five of Virginia voters but only one out of five of New Jersey voters saw the abortion issue as an important issue to them in the gubernatorial race.
- Younger women, newcomers to the South, and more highly educated voters tended to mention the issue as an important election concern.
- Among pro-lifers, frequent religious service attendance heightened concern about the issue in the campaign; frequency of religious service attendance had no impact on pro-choicers.
- Pro-choice Republicans and pro-life Democrats were less likely than pro-life Republicans and pro-choice Democrats to link concern for the issue with the gubernatorial race.

- Voters with mixed feelings about abortion policy were less likely to consider the issue relevant to the election. Nevertheless, differences between New Jersey and Virginia suggested that even those with mixed feelings about abortion policy could be moved by carefully crafted, heavily emphasized appeals.

- Virginia voters were more likely to have the potential to cast an issue vote on abortion policy. About one out of three Virginia voters and one out of five New Jersey voters saw Wilder or Florio as more opposed than Coleman or Courter to restrictions *and* had a personal opinion about new government restrictions.

- The abortion issue influenced the votes of those who could differentiate the candidates' stands on the question of new restrictions. Coleman's and Courter's support was highest among differentiating pro-lifers and lowest among differentiating pro-choicers; the reverse was true for Wilder and Florio.

- Voters selecting candidates who did not share their views on the abortion issue tended to lack information that would allow them to differentiate between the candidates.

## CHAPTER 3: THE LEGISLATIVE RACES

- Of the legislative candidates interviewed from districts where the abortion issue seemed likely to be important, about two-fifths of New Jersey candidates and half of Virginia candidates saw it as an important factor in their races. Legislators reported receiving more pro-choice than pro-life voter contacts following *Webster* and during the campaign.

- Four conditions influenced whether the issue would be important in these legislative elections: 1) attempts by at least one candidate to make it an issue, 2) media coverage, 3) gubernatorial campaign events, and 4) issue group activity.

- Republican legislative candidates more frequently saw themselves as disadvantaged by the issue's prominence in the gubernatorial races. They cited three reasons: 1) the issue drove support away from the top of the ticket, affecting GOP candidates further down the ticket, 2) it raised a divisive issue which divided their partisan base; and 3) it reinforced partisan stereotypes.

- Pro-choice endorsed candidates were more likely than pro-life endorsees to see their endorsements as having positive effects on the number of votes won or on campaign resources.

- The 1989 campaign events seemed to strengthen the re-emerging pro-choicers' ties with legislators.

- The abortion issue created internal divisiveness among Republicans. The conflict is particularly strong in Virginia, where the New Right has become a strong presence within that party during the 1980's. Discontent is evident to a lesser extent among Democrats, as some pro-life Democrats feel excluded from their party.

- Voters were much less likely to mention the abortion issue as an important issue in the legislative races than in the gubernatorial races. Nevertheless, in districts where races were close, the issue could make a difference in outcomes.

- Voters' lower concern with the abortion issue in legislative elections seem to result from a lack of knowledge about legislative elections rather than a rejection of the importance of the issue.

- Legislative election results cannot be assumed to reflect the "will of the people" on this issue, and thus the policies passed by legislatures cannot be assumed to reflect the views of the voters for whom they speak.

## CONCLUSION

Six conditions will be critical in determining whether and how the abortion issue affects general elections in 1990:

- The staying power of the abortion issue as a policy that is important to voters.

- The extent to which other issues that are closer to the problems voters face in their daily lives take precedence over the abortion issue.

- The relative success of pro-choice and pro-life activists and candidates in framing the issue and defining their opponents' positions.

- The willingness of at least one candidate to use the issue aggressively and to educate the voters about candidate differences on the issue and about why those differences are important.

- The relative ability of pro-choice and pro-life groups to sustain activity and the image of political clout.
- The attitudes of the voters in the state.

# INTRODUCTION

The Supreme Court's decision in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* set off a war between pro-choice and pro-life forces that is being waged across the nation in statehouses and at the ballot box. Since *Webster*, bills have been proposed in many state legislatures which would: require waiting periods, parental consent and/or notification; ban abortion for purposes of sex selection; require spousal/paternal notification; regulate clinics; ban abortion as a means of birth control; or require viability testing. Pro-choice groups have also sought legislation to codify the right to abortion as defined under *Roe v. Wade*. To date, only two states and one territory (Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Guam) have succeeded in passing more restrictive legislation, and one state (West Virginia) has eliminated public funding of abortions. The governors in four states (Idaho, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Michigan) have vetoed more restrictive legislation. One state (Connecticut) has codified the provisions of *Roe v. Wade*, while in another (New Hampshire) the governor vetoed a legislative attempt to repeal the state's restrictive pre-*Roe* law. The fate of a second bill passed by the Louisana legislature which would ban abortion except in the cases of rape, incest or threat to the life of the mother is unknown at this time; the governor must decide whether to sign or veto the bill.

Conventional wisdom has it that the pro-choice groups were activated by the *Webster* decision. Prior to *Webster*, the pro-choice position had been the status quo and the pro-life groups had been mobilized to fight. After *Webster*, both sides had reason to be active as they battled to define what the new legal status of abortion would be. The status of abortion rights remains unclear following the recently decided parental consent cases, *Ohio v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health* and *Hodgson v. Minnesota*.

While pro-choice and pro-life groups in a few states have worked (largely unsuccessfully) to get referenda on the abortion issue, in most cases reproductive policy legislation will be decided only indirectly by the voters, through their elected representatives. Legislators will be the willing or unwilling combatants who must propose (or not propose) changes in laws to restrict abortion rights and who will vote on these bills once proposed. Governors will have their say through their informal power to influence and formal power to veto legislation.

What happens after the election in the states regarding abortion policy depends in large part on electoral campaigns: the extent to which voters support candidates who reflect their views on the issue; the pressure that elected officials on the "wrong side" of public opinion feel to alter their views so they are more in accord with constituents' attitudes; the ties activist groups forge with candidates during the campaigns; and the success or failure of candidates and activists to define through the free and/or paid media the issues that will drive the elections.

At this early stage of the battle over abortion rights, a key question is whether and how the electoral process has become a significant weapon for influencing governmental action on the abortion issue. Only two states have held both gubernatorial and state legislative general elections following *Webster* — New Jersey and Virginia. These 1989 elections may provide valuable early insight into the way the abortion issue "plays" in state-level general elections in this new, uncertain post-*Webster* era.

This report weaves together information provided by voters, candidates, and activists to analyze whether and how the abortion issue played a role in the two states. To gather our data, we surveyed registered voters in New Jersey and Virginia prior to the election and interviewed legislative candidates, gubernatorial campaign activists, party activists, and pro-choice and pro-life activists after the election. We polled voters from across both states, as well as samples in each state from four selected legislative districts where we believed the abortion issue might affect the outcomes of legislative races. In addition, we interviewed the legislative candidates in these eight targeted districts and in a number of other districts where candidates differed on the issue.[1]

We examine when and why voters' concern with the abortion issue was translated into action during the 1989 election campaigns in New Jersey and Virginia and what this means for representative government. The purpose of this report is to explain how the abortion issue affected the 1989 general election outcomes for legislative and gubernatorial offices in these two states. Our broader purpose is to assess the conditions which may affect the issue's importance in future general elections across the nation.

[1]For more detailed methodological information, see Appendix.

# CHAPTER 1:
# THE CAMPAIGN CONTEXT

To understand how the abortion issue affected the 1989 New Jersey and Virginia elections, we must consider the contexts in which these elections occurred. One important aspect of context is the political culture. A second critical component of context is the general interest the voters expressed in the issue, independent of specific campaigns. The voters' concern with the issue at an abstract level represented the *potential* for the issue to become important in the general election. The challenge for activists and candidates wishing to use the issue in their campaigns was to help voters see the relevance of the election to their general concern about abortion policy, thereby converting their potential interest into issue-based votes on election day. Knowing how important the voters thought competing issues were and how they felt toward activists on both sides of the abortion issue contributes to our understanding of the campaign context for legislative and gubernatorial candidates in both states. The background information presented in this chapter provides the foundation for our explanations in Chapters 2 and 3 of how the campaigns were shaped and how the voters reacted to them.

## POLITICAL CULTURE

As a set of shared public beliefs characterizing a state over time, political culture sets the boundaries within which campaigns take place. The campaign activities and framing of the issue appropriate for one state may not work well in another.

Over the past several years, there has been high population mobility and an influx of non-native residents into both states, but the impact on political culture has probably been greater in Virginia. Many newcomers to Virginia have been non-southerners with different political attitudes from native-born Virginians. While non-southerners have migrated to all corners of the state, they have concentrated most heavily in the Washington, D.C. suburbs in the northern portion of the state and are a substantial proportion of the populace there. This has contributed to vast intra-state regional differences and to the growing tendency to characterize Virginia as at least two states — a northern, more liberal, better educated, wealthier, non-native, suburban state, and a more conservative, less well-educated, less affluent, native,

more rural southern state.[1] Despite the fact that many of its residents have migrated into the state from other states, Virginia does have an historically grounded libertarian Jeffersonian state heritage. In a break with tradition, Virginia, once part of the solid Democratic South, has experienced a resurgence of the Republican party, resulting in a more competitive electoral climate.

Official registration records and various polls show New Jersey to be almost a microcosm of the United States, with urban, suburban and rural areas, significant blue-collar ethnic areas as well as sizable black and Hispanic populations. New Jersey has many highly educated suburban voters and union members likely to be somewhat liberal on some issues. However, about half of the voters are Catholic, with substantial Protestant (about one-quarter) and smaller Jewish (7%) minorities. This contrasts with Virginia's more Protestant electorate.

About four out of ten voters are independents, compared to almost one-third who are Democrats and a little over one-quarter who are Republicans. When pushed, two-thirds of independents lean toward a party, splitting about evenly between the two major parties.

Compared to residents of other states, New Jerseyans have a less unified state culture and know less about statewide elections, due in part to the state's distinctive media setting, which hinders candidates' abilities to get their messages across statewide in the paid and unpaid media markets.[2] The only newspaper considered to have statewide impact, *The Star Ledger*, is read mainly in the northern half of the state. New Jersey has no major commercial network television stations to focus solely on the state; north Jersey residents get newscasts from New York City, while south Jersey viewers receive Philadelphia stations. These news programs give only a fraction of their coverage to New Jersey politics.

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[1]For the purposes of this analysis of the abortion issue, observation of activists and analysis of trends across districts suggested a clear dichotomy between the northern Virginia and downstate areas. Other characterizations capture the greater diversity of the state. For more information about Virginia's political culture see, Scott Keeter, "Virginia's Party System: From Museum Piece to Mainstream" in Maureen Moakley (editor) *Party Realignment in the American States*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, forthcoming.

[2]For a more detailed explanation of New Jersey's political culture see, Cliff Zukin, "Political Culture and Public Opinion," in Gerald R. Pomper (editor), *The Political State of New Jersey*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986.

Northern Virginians have similar media experiences — having their TV news focus largely on nearby Washington, D.C. and relying on the *Washington Post* for much of their news. However, there are numerous media markets downstate which focus on Virginia.

If the abortion issue was going to become important in either state, it would have to compete in both the gubernatorial and legislative elections with other issues which appeared to have a more direct impact on daily life. In New Jersey, the crisis of absurdly high automobile insurance rates, high taxes, the condition of the state's economy, and concerns about the environment — particularly in light of the periodic pollution which ravaged the Jersey shore in recent years — gave voters plenty to be concerned about in addition to abortion. In Virginia, issues competing with abortion for voter attention included: transportation, taxes, crime, family life education, and the seldom mentioned but ubiquitous race issue brought to the fore by the presence of a black gubernatorial candidate. Thus, there was no guarantee that abortion would become a central issue or that any candidate would want it to assume primacy.

The candidates in both gubernatorial races undoubtedly had polling information suggesting that voters generally favored a pro-choice position. However, the message from the electorate was not simple and straightforward. Our surveys (Figure 1-1) did show that over twice as many voters expressed pro-choice views as pro-life views when asked: "Would you say that you favor or oppose new government restrictions on abortion?"[3] But while a majority of voters in both states may oppose new government restrictions, they are not necessarily very comfortable with the idea of abortion in all situations.

We asked voters a battery of seven additional questions to tap various attitudes toward abortion per se and toward "choice."[4] Based on their responses, we constructed a pro-life/pro-choice index. The index ranges from 0, meaning that the respondent gave no pro-choice responses and all pro-life responses to the questions,

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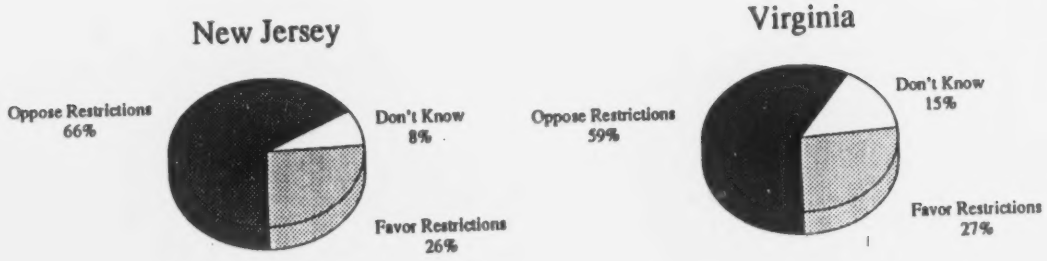
[3]Percentages have been rounded. Rounding error may result in percentages totaling to 101% or 99%. The number of cases for this figure and all others is included in the appendix.

[4]The issues addressed were: parental consent; public funding of abortions; the balance of rights afforded to the pregnant woman and the unborn/fetus; government intervention; morality of abortion; circumstances under which abortion should be prohibited; and allowing abortion under economic hardship. The wording of these questions is presented in the appendix.

Figure 1-1:
Attitudes Toward New Restrictions on Abortion



to 7, indicating that the respondent gave all pro-choice responses and no pro-life responses to the questions. New Jersey is, as we expected, more pro-choice than Virginia (Figure 1-2). In New Jersey, 54% of the voters gave pro-choice answers on five or more of the seven questions. In Virginia, only 44% gave five or more pro-choice responses, but fully 60% gave a majority of pro-choice responses (four or more).

Even among voters who gave few or no pro-choice responses on the index, substantial numbers still opposed new restrictions on abortion (Figure 1-3); while they might have significant reservations, they hesitated to support a narrowing of women's choices. New Jersey voters scoring greater than 3 on the index and Virginia voters scoring greater than 2 on the index were more likely to oppose than to favor restrictions. "Ambivalent" voters in the middle range of the scale were likely to be swayed by the issue framing in campaign messages. Based on their replies, many in the "mushy middle" did not seem very comfortable with abortion per se, yet they did not feel comfortable with government limiting individual rights either. Thus, if the issue was defined in terms of "choice" or "individual rights," they might be more inclined to support a pro-choice candidate; if framed as "abortion," they might move away from that position.

## GENERAL IMPORTANCE OF THE ABORTION ISSUE

The *Webster* decision presented a true challenge to pro-choice forces: If they wanted to have any political influence, they had to raise interest in the issue among their adherents in the same way that pro-life groups had done in the wake of the *Roe v. Wade* decision. While pro-choice groups existed prior to *Webster*, the public interest which would motivate people to get involved had been low. The question was whether voters would view the abortion issue as more important when the policy they favored became endangered.

Clearly, a general interest among voters in the abortion issue is no guarantee of a specific outcome on election day. It is an indicator of the *potential* for the issue to become important in campaigns. Two important tasks of campaigns are to make voters see certain issues as important *and* to help voters link concern for an issue with voting decisions. The *Webster* decision had clearly raised interest in the issue. The challenge for campaigns that wanted to avoid the issue was to lower its saliency and to convince voters that they should *not* connect their general concern with

Figure 1-2:
Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index Scores

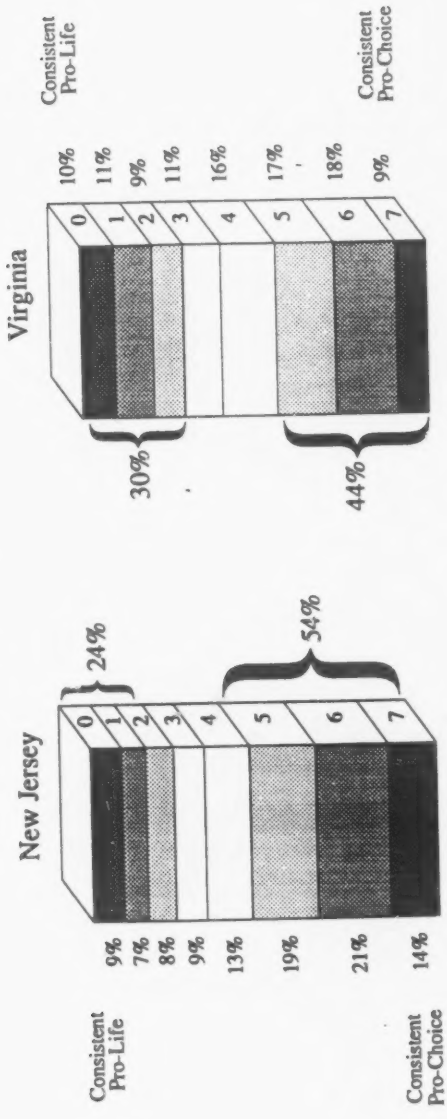
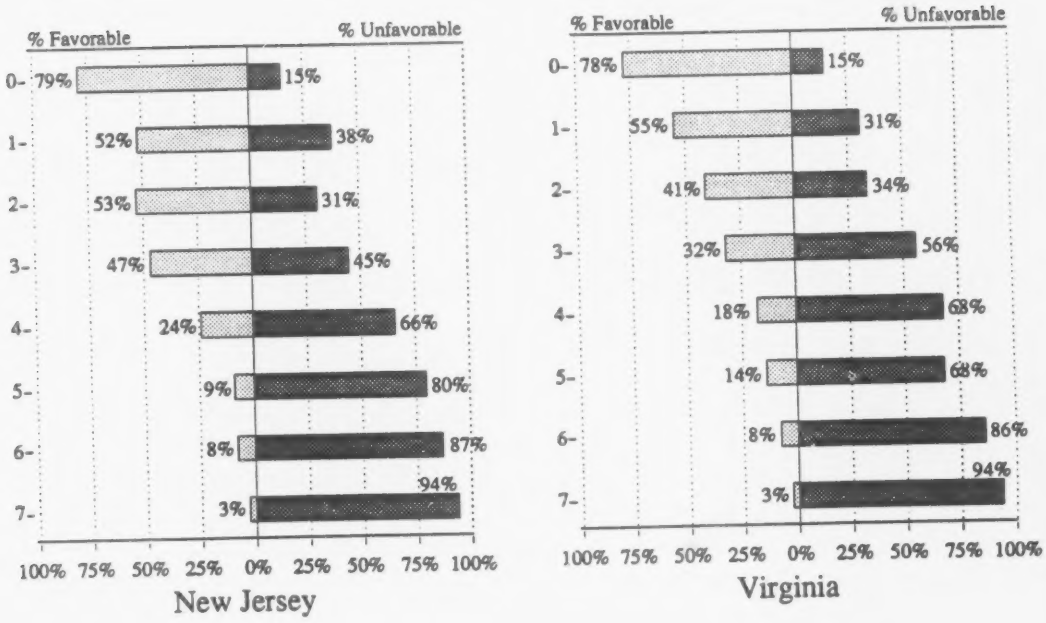


Figure 1-3:
Attitudes Toward New Restrictions
Given Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index Score



abortion policy to legislative or gubernatorial votes. Alternatively, the challenge for those wishing to use the issue was to sustain public concern, to talk about it in a manner that would maximize public support, *and* to educate voters as to why that concern was relevant to action in the voting booth. If voters see abortion policy as a legitimate and salient concern which may be potentially affected by who wins the election, they may be more receptive to information pertaining to the issue when they are exposed to it by campaigns. Ultimately, they may be more likely to use that information to help them make a decision on election day.

To see just how important the issue was to voters in general we asked the following question:

> *Please tell me how important each of the following issues is to you. First, [abortion] — Is this issue very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important to you?*[5]

Three out of five Virginians and about half of New Jerseyans saw abortion as a very important issue (Figure 1-4). Therefore, in both states the *potential* was present for this issue to become important in the campaigns.

An even more critical question for the candidates, activists and citizens concerned about the issue is: *Which* voters thought this issue was very important? Figures 1-5a and 1-5b illustrate who thought this issue was important in two different ways. In both states, those who favored restrictions were slightly more likely to see the issue as important than those who opposed restrictions (Figure 1-5a). But looking just at those who rated the issue as very important, opponents of restrictions outnumbered those who favored restrictions by about two to one (Figure 1-5b). *If* those voters who were very interested in the abortion issue were motivated to link that general interest with the ongoing campaigns and elections, it was likely that the gubernatorial and legislative candidates in both states would be more likely to feel pressure from pro-choice voters than from pro-life voters. There was no assurance this linkage would occur; the *conversion* of general interest into interest that affects voting decisions will be discussed in the next chapter.

What was clear was that the potential for this issue to become important in elections was higher than many had seen in the past. Our interviews with the voters,

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[5]The lack of a specific referent, such as legislative or gubernatorial races, makes the question a measure of *general* concern rather than of what was guiding voter thinking on election day.

## Figure 1-4:
## General Importance of Abortion Issue

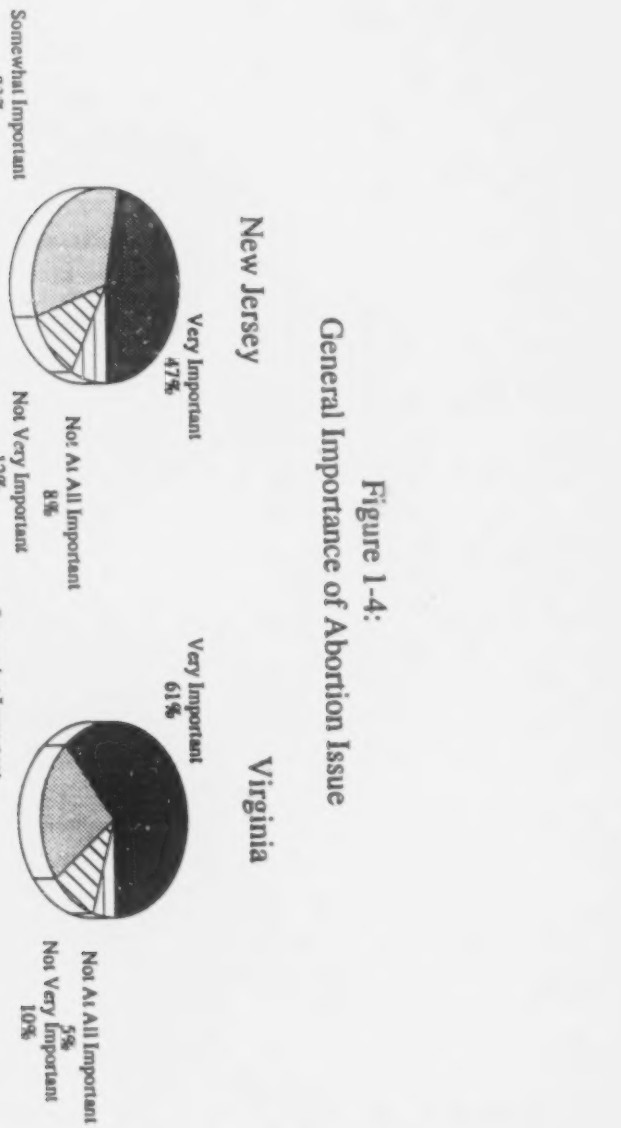


Figure 1-5a:
General Importance of Abortion Issue
For Those Who Favor or Oppose New Restrictions

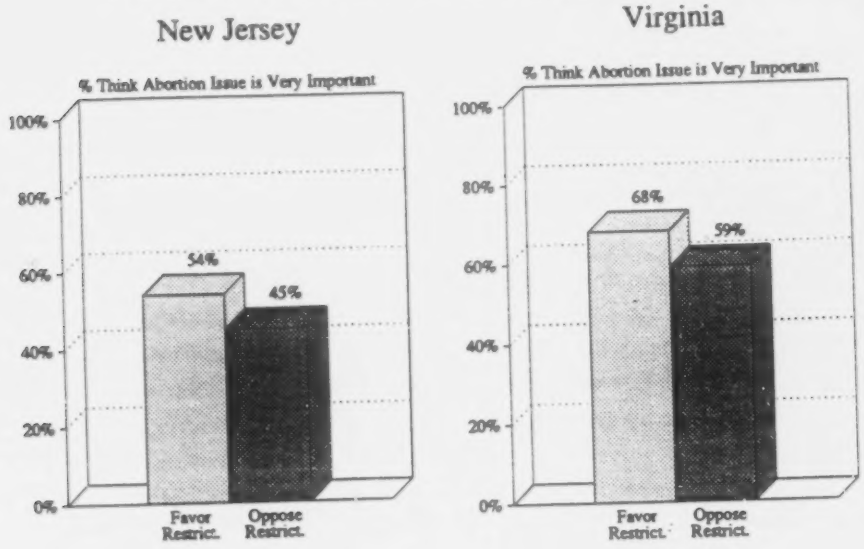
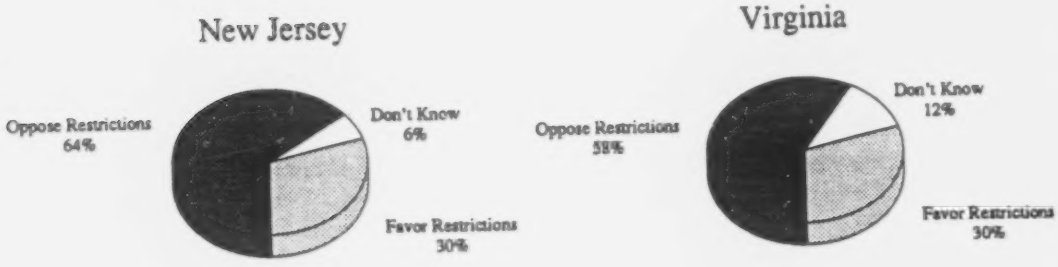



Figure 1-5b:
Attitudes Toward New Restrictions Among Voters
Who Think Abortion Issue is Very Important



political activists and candidates suggest that the level of interest among voters in both states was a product of: 1) the increased relevancy of the issue in light of the *Webster* decision; 2) demographic characteristics of individual voters; and 3) voters' political orientations.

## THE IMPACT OF *WEBSTER* ON GENERAL INTEREST IN THE ABORTION ISSUE

If the *Webster* decision had not been handed down in 1989, or if the case had never come before the Court, it seems likely that the voters would not have accorded the abortion issue as much importance as they did. Many candidates and activists believed that the high level of importance that voters in both states assigned to the issue was almost certainly in part a product of the *Webster* decision. Many believed that *Webster* not only raised the saliency of the issue for citizens, but that it had a disproportionate impact on pro-choice voters. Not everyone noticed a sustained impact, but according to many of those we interviewed, the Supreme Court changed the dynamics of what candidates and activists would encounter among the electorate. Some legislative candidates in Virginia noted the following:

> *It's true that nothing galvanized the issue or pushed it to the top like the* Webster *decision did.*

> *The* Webster *decision definitely activated a much broader group of people.... And so I heard from many more people, many more diverse people — senior citizens who didn't want any restrictions placed on it, housewives who were not otherwise politically active — that broadened up quite a bit.... It probably tripled in terms of the interest in the thing.*

> *It was like a light switch being turned on after the* Webster *decision. You didn't hear word one about it previously. We knocked on 6,800 doors, and started in April knocking on doors. From the Court decision forward, I would say six out of ten voters who brought up any issue would bring up the abortion issue.... I had always heard from the right-to-life people. The pro-choice people, I think, were fairly complacent until* Webster *and it really galvanized them into action.*

The observations were similar in New Jersey:

> *As soon as* Webster *came down, it was as if all hell broke loose.... Once choice came in, automobile insurance went out the window.... The only issue about the time the election came around that had any meaning to anybody was...choice and [it] became ethical, the ethics of the incumbents. Every other issue, the environment, clean streets, the beach, automobile insurance — it was really gone, nobody cared.*

> *It seems after the U.S. Supreme Court decision that my mail quadrupled for pro-choice, you see. Pro-choice made up a lot of ground in terms of writing to me after the U.S. Supreme Court decision.*

Observations such as these were common in both states, but they were especially common in the more urbanized areas of the two states. Indeed, while some legislators from more rural areas of the states had prepared to hear about this issue from their constituents, they were surprised at how few questions they received.

What was it about *Webster* that led to this increased interest? Clearly one factor had to be what many perceived to be the threat to abortion rights, as one pro-choice activist pointed out:

> *As far as I know, in the last ten years...it never came up. And I admit myself, I never gave it a second thought.... Nobody really took it seriously. No one had to worry about it. As soon as* Webster *came...we realized...the worst could happen.... It galvanized everybody, it galvanized public opinion, it made people realize that we cannot sit back and say it won't happen because we were only one vote on the Supreme Court away from it happening.... So the choice people learned you've got to get out there and use the political system.*

Pro-choice activists worked to convey this threat to the voters. At the same time, their ranks were infused by the previously inactive donating their time and money to spread the word of the threat in this new post-*Webster* era.

Many felt that media coverage also made voters think about the issue more, and thus made it more important than it might have been otherwise. One New Jersey activist commented:

> *This year was different from every other year because of* Webster.... *And every newspaper was doing polls, public opinion. Where every*

> *other year the newspapers didn't ask the abortion question, this year they did. So that...it got a lot of publicity free, more than it ever had before. Before, it was like I was the lone voice crying in the wilderness, you know, vote pro-choice, vote pro-choice. And everybody said, yes, fine, he's a nice guy. This year people said, you're right.*

A Virginia pro-life legislative candidate also observed that the media played a part in priming the issue for the public eye.

> *When the abortion decision came down, suddenly that became a very common question.... Abortion is a sexy issue.... But, roads and taxes were the bread and butter and those are not all that exciting.... I knew things were not looking good when the* Post *sent out two questions.... Now it seems clear that those were the two main issues. They asked, you know, about taxes, and they asked about abortion. In the middle of the summer, it seemed, to me, that was a very cockeyed thing to do. I think they were defining the issues by asking such questions.... The media is almost daily on the abortion issue. It was unrelenting. And I think they had a lot to do with defining the issues in the campaign.*

*Webster* was an important factor in raising the issue among voters, not only because it changed the definition of the status quo, but also because it made abortion into a breaking news story. It created a legal environment where more news stories could focus on the battle over abortion rights because the situation was unstable and in flux. And, perhaps more importantly for understanding how it would affect politics, it was talked about more as a question of "choice" or "individual rights" rather than simply abortion per se.

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

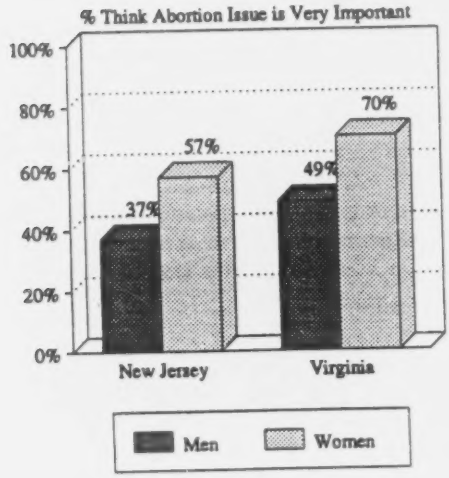
Political factors like the timing of *Webster* are important, but they are not the only considerations. Demographic characteristics may also influence the way people see their interests in the political world. We looked at three such factors: gender, age, and education.

## Gender

The conventional wisdom has been that while women and men may share similar views about the abortion issue, women are more likely than men to see the abortion issue as important, and hence, more likely to act on their concerns. In fact, while women and men are equally likely to oppose new restrictions, Figure 1-6 shows that women were more likely than men to cite the abortion issue as important by a margin of about three to two in both states. Furthermore, women rated the issue as more important than men regardless of whether they favored or opposed new restrictions. The issue's higher saliency among women voters was manifested in a variety of ways, ranging from the questioning of candidates along the campaign trail to letter writing and phoning of legislative candidates to increased campaign and issue group activism as volunteers or contributors. Not all candidates reported experiences reflecting women's greater interest, but those who did came from districts as diverse as the mountains of Virginia and the suburbs of New York City.

> *[The few times] it was mentioned, the people who mentioned it to me were all women and they would walk up to me and without saying how they felt, they'd say, I want to know how you feel about this abortion issue.* (Virginia Democratic legislative candidate)

Figure 1-6:
General Importance of Abortion Issue
for Men and Women



> *It was very important because many, many people made it a one issue campaign. I had spoken to people, particularly women.... They didn't care about insurance. They didn't care about taxes. They cared about nothing but this abortion issue.* (New Jersey Republican legislative candidate)

The value that some candidates placed on appealing to women voters is obvious from the comments made by one male Republican legislative candidate in Virginia, who would not be defined as pro-choice; the candidate was displeased with a policy statement on abortion, written by his primarily male campaign staffers.

> *My writers were pro-life. A lot of their stuff ended up in the trash and we re-wrote it.... I got all the secretaries in the office and we went down to that conference room and we rewrote the whole blessed thing. Because I wanted to put it in a way that secretaries and their husbands — the people who really do the work and are out there — would understand it. I would have to say it was probably 70% pro-choice and 30% pro-life. But they lived in harmony.*

While more women than men saw the issue as important, candidates did not see the abortion issue as having the potential to motivate women voters alone. As these candidates pointed out:

> *Men would bring it up because they said they would resent this being considered a woman's issue, although it is a family issue. It's an issue that belongs to everyone. They said if it was just a woman's issue, it's taking away from the man's interest and responsibility.* (New Jersey Democratic legislative candidate)

> *Even the men that were working with the Democratic committee are somewhat moderate to liberal, felt very strongly about this issue.... I didn't realize the men would even care, but a lot of men did care and they felt very strongly that their wives should not have to go back to the old procedures and worrying about whether they needed to go to another state to have an abortion if they needed it.* (Virginia Democratic legislative candidate)

Based on general interest patterns, women would seem to be potentially more receptive to campaign messages aimed at mobilizing voters around the abortion issue.

Since more women oppose new restrictions than favor them in these states, pro-choice appeals had the potential to be particularly beneficial for candidates.[6]

## Age

A majority of voters in all age groups opposed new restrictions, but that opposition was highest among those under 50. In Virginia, 53% of those over 50, but about 63% of those under 50, opposed new restrictions. Similarly, 59% of New Jersey voters over 50, compared with 69% of those under 50, opposed new government restrictions.

If self interest is the only factor that influences whether or not this issue is important, then women and men in their peak reproductive years — who are more supportive of the pro-choice position — would be more likely than their older counterparts to view the issue as important, and thus have a higher potential for mobilization. However, Figure 1-7 shows that age is far less important than gender in determining the weight voters attach to the issue. The experience of some candidates seems to bear out this view:

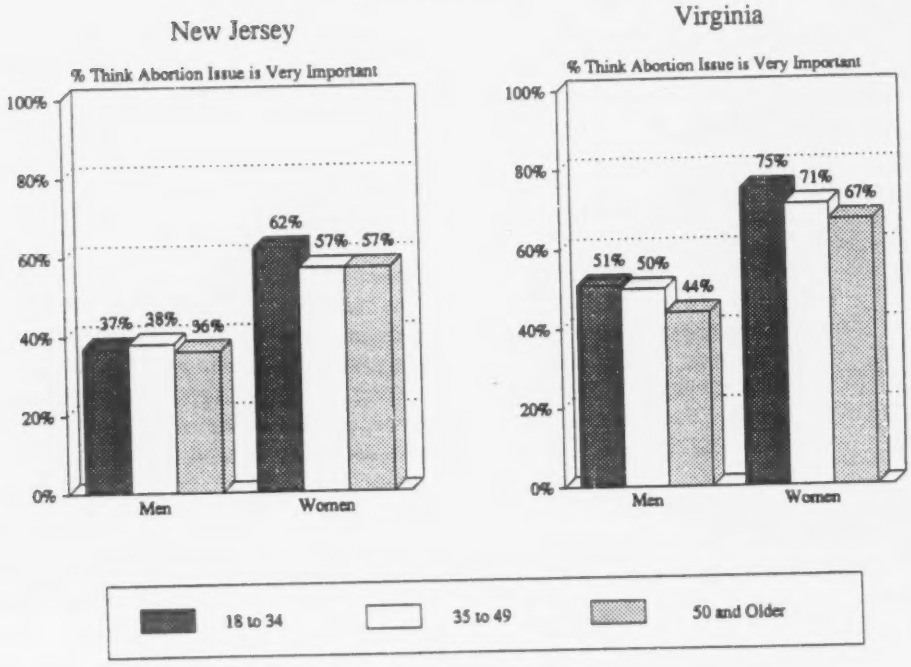
> *Middle-aged or older...that's the way my district tends to be. I mean, you have $250,000 homes, you don't have a whole lot of people in their 20's.... [And] the older people are just as pro-choice around here as the younger people.* (Virginia Republican legislative candidate)

> *But there were people that, when I went to the door and introduced myself, they said, O.K., one question and I'm going to base my vote on that. And I thought to myself, what an unfortunate situation in our society.... I found this very interesting, the women who asked me were beyond childbearing age. And I'm going, it's not an impact on you directly. I don't care which way it goes, you're beyond childbearing age. And then, O.K. maybe you have daughters or what not and that's O.K., I can understand that, but I go to myself, that's not going to be the major thing that determines how this state is run.* (Virginia Republican legislative candidate)

[6]Whether or not these appeals succeeded in luring more women voters to the pro-choice candidates is unclear. No significant gender gap was evident in the final outcome of the New Jersey gubernatorial race. Figures on a gender gap in Virginia are inconclusive because exit polls vary and some diverge substantially from the actual election outcome.

*And I think the thing that impressed me was that...you couldn't categorize, you couldn't say, well they're long-time single women. I had a 43 year-old housewife saying, wait a minute, you mean if I'm going to have a change-of-life baby and I decide I'm not ready for it I got to worry about it? And 50 year-old women, I can remember in the campaign saying, I wouldn't want my granddaughter to be deprived of the choice. So I think* Webster *served to broaden the concern amongst the womanhood.* (New Jersey Democratic legislative candidate)

Figure 1-7:
General Importance of Abortion Issue
By Age for Men and Women



### Education

Much of the media coverage of the abortion issue and its impact on the election focused on highly educated women crossing party lines. More highly educated voters in both states are more likely to oppose new restrictions on abortion. In Virginia, 71% of college graduates, but only 53% of those with less than a college degree, oppose new restrictions. In New Jersey, 70% of college graduates, but only 61% of those with less education, oppose new restrictions. However, registered voters with varying levels of education are equally likely to see the abortion issue as generally very important.

## POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS

### Party Affiliation

To the extent that pro-choice Republicans and pro-life Democrats devalue the abortion issue's importance in politics, the potential to mobilize these voters to cross party lines on this issue is decreased, and possibly (depending on their numbers within the party) the potential for intra-party conflict may be lessened.[7] In both New Jersey and Virginia, pro-choice Republicans are less likely than pro-life Republicans to rate the issue as very important in general (Figure 1-8a). In contrast, pro-life Democrats are just as likely as pro-choice Democrats to rate this issue as very important in general (Figure 1-8b).

Figure 1-9a shows what this difference between pro-choice and pro-life Republican voters means, once the importance of the issue is addressed. In Virginia, the pro-choicers' advantage over pro-lifers among all Republicans is eroded from 15 points to only two points among those who think the issue is very important.[8]

---

[7]For purposes of analysis, the Republican category combined Republicans who initially declared themselves Republicans and Republican leaners (those who initially reject a party label, but respond to the follow-up question that they lean toward the Republican party). Similarly declared Democrats and those leaning toward the Democratic party have been combined under the label "Democrats." Any substantial differences between declared partisans and leaners will be noted.

[8]In Virginia, those who declared themselves Republicans were somewhat *more* likely than those who leaned to the GOP to oppose restrictions.

Similarly, the advantage of pro-choice Republicans in New Jersey shrinks from 31 points among all Republicans to 13 points among Republicans who think the issue is very important. Thus, this tendency for pro-choice Republicans to place slightly less emphasis on the issue than pro-lifers in their party ironically could make the issue potentially more divisive in elections, because it means that those who care about the issue are more evenly divided over it.

The situation seems particularly serious among Virginia's Republicans who were reinvigorated by a transfusion of new blood during the 1980's. These newcomers have tended to reflect the New Right perspectives associated with Ronald Reagan. The comments of two Virginia Republican legislative candidates illustrate the debate among Republicans over their differences on this issue and the problems this creates for compromise in the post-*Webster* era:

> *I think that there's room for both views in this party. I'm sorry to think we're so polarized. But it's getting so that maybe I better think about another party if I want to stay involved with politics. At the state convention there was a resolution to state that there was room for both points of view in the State Party. It failed 40 to 27.* (Pro-choice Republican)

Figure 1-8a:
General Importance of Abortion Issue
Among Republicans
By Attitudes Toward New Restrictions

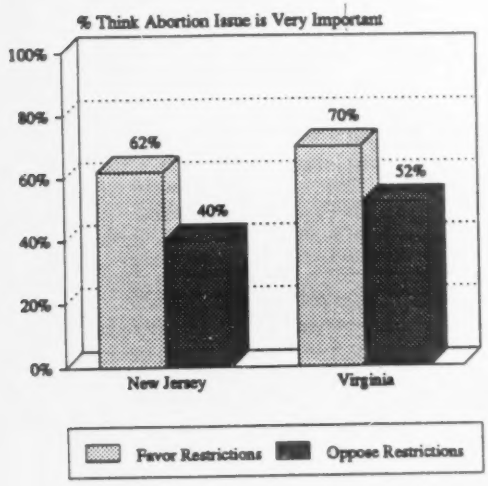
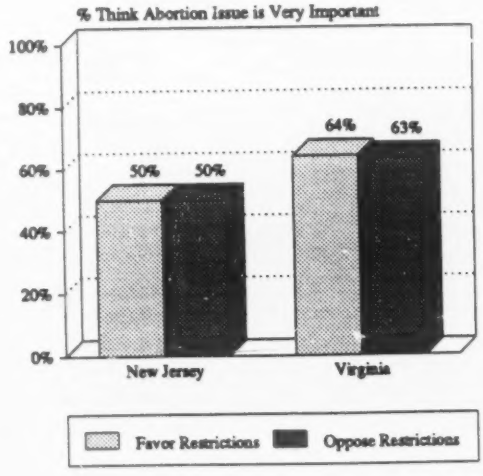


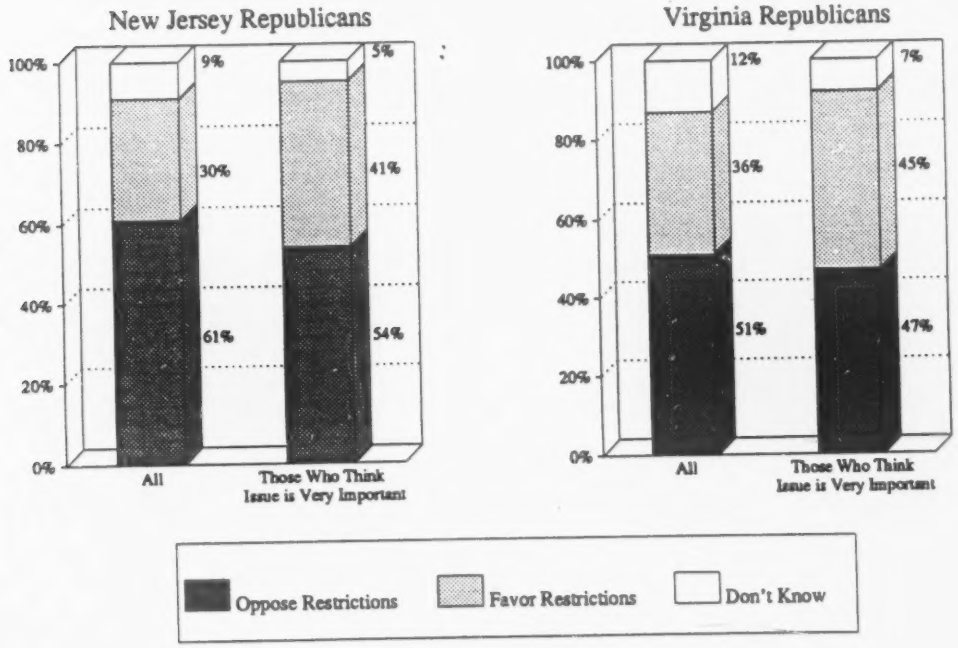

Figure 1-8b:
General Importance of Abortion Issue
Among Democrats
By Attitudes Toward New Restrictions



*Well, see, [my wife] and I are very strong Republicans because of what we perceive as a Republican family values approach. And what [one party leader] was saying was, a lot of us are Republicans not for that reason but for the pocketbook reasons.... For those of us who are Republicans who are driven by the traditional family values approach to politics...there's not really room for compromise on this issue.*
(Pro-life Republican)

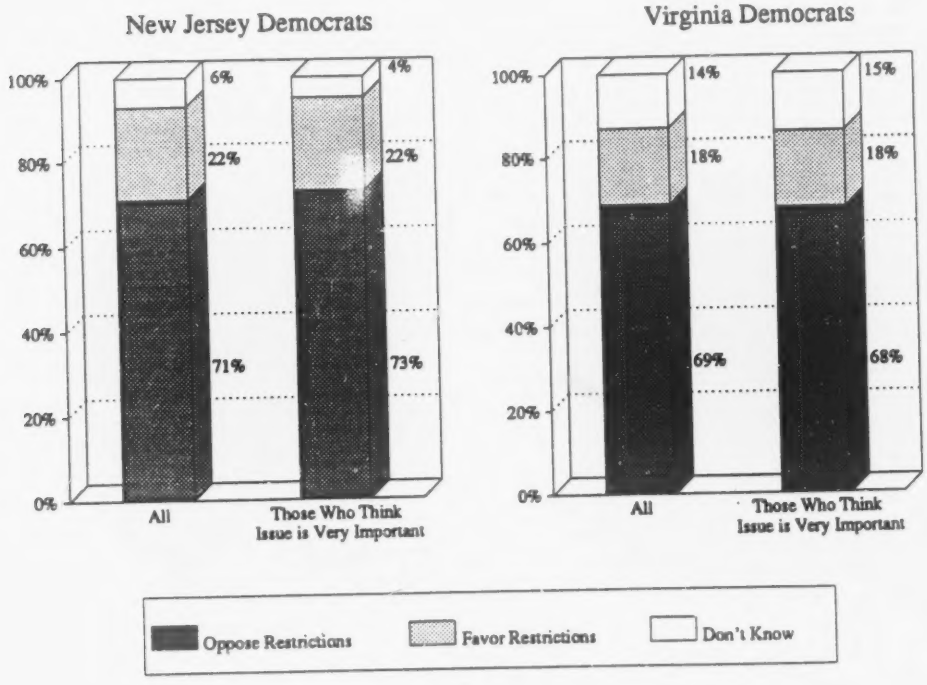
Therefore this issue appears to have the potential to create serious and perhaps insoluble conflicts for the Republican party, with profound implications in general elections in states where abortion is as important as it was in New Jersey and Virginia.

Figure 1-9a:
Republicans' Attitudes Toward New Restrictions:
All Versus Those Who Think Abortion Issue is Very Important



Although pro-life Democrats were just as likely as pro-choice Democrats to see the issue as very important, Figure 1-9b shows that pro-choice Democrats are dominant in both states, not only among rank and file Democrats as a whole, but also among those who think the issue is very important. The 50-point advantage that Democrats opposing new restrictions have over Democrats favoring new government restrictions makes the issue less potentially destructive for Democrats than for Republicans (although in Chapter 3, we will discuss evidence that some pro-life Democratic candidates felt estranged from their party).

Figure 1-9b:
Democrats' Attitudes Toward New Restrictions:
All Versus Those Who Think Abortion Issue is Very Important



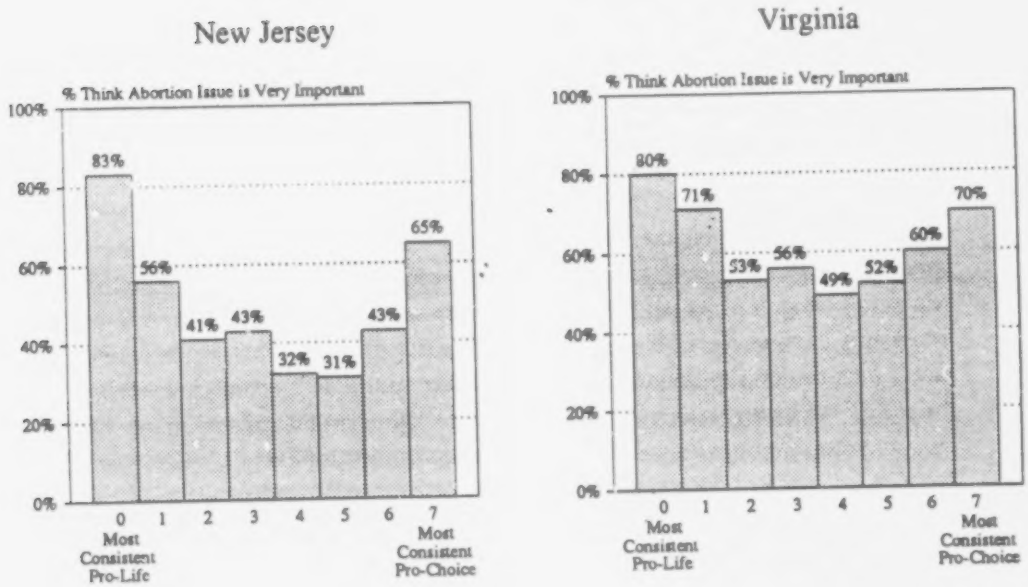
Thus, it is little surprise that a pragmatic pro-life Virginia Republican activist expressed some concern for his party's future, if Republican becomes synonymous with "pro-life" and Democrat becomes a synonym for "pro-choice":

> *If it becomes a situation where the Republican party is painted in a corner of being the only pro-life party, the Democrats become all the pro-choice, I think there'll be a certain amount of reshuffling, there'll be a certain amount of realignment, but number one, it won't be in our best interest and number two, it won't accomplish the goal of the pro-life movement, which is to restrict and eventually outlaw abortions or limit abortions.... If the party were going to be perceived as the pro-life party, I want to make sure the Democrats, the Democrat pro-lifers, are forced out of the woodwork, too, so that there's not an automatic assumption that just because you're a Republican candidate you're pro-life....*

### Attitude Consistency

In both states, voters at the most consistent ends of our pro-life/pro-choice index were more likely to see the issue as very important (Figure 1-10). These voters, who comprise about one-fifth of the voters in the two states, are the people who would seem potentially more receptive to campaign messages about the issue. For these voters, the way the issue is framed by campaigns may be less important than the prevalence of campaign appeals which would make them see how the issue relates to voting in a particular election. Not all voters are as comfortable with the availability of abortion rights as the most consistent pro-choicers or as comfortable with a total ban on abortion as the most consistent pro-lifers. Toward the center of the scale, which represents more mixed feelings about abortion, the importance of the issue to voters declines dramatically. The less precipitous decline in Virginia than in New Jersey suggests that campaign dynamics (e.g., extent of media coverage, the framing of the issue) can play a very important role in structuring the way people think about the issue, whether voters are willing to even think about it at all and how they might respond if they do think about it. Heightening concern among ambivalent voters increases the potential for mobilization of even this "mushy middle" of the electorate.

## Figure 1-10:
## General Importance of Abortion Issue
## Given Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index Score



## RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE

The potential for the abortion issue to affect voting decisions appears high, especially since about two out of three voters, (both pro-choice and pro-life) said that they would not support a candidate whose stand on the abortion issue differed substantially from their own (Figure 1-11). But voters go to the polls thinking about many different issues, or perhaps thinking about no issues at all. There was reason to believe that other issues could dominate the campaigns, for as impressive as the level of interest in the abortion issue was among voters in both states — especially among women — the potential for the abortion issue to be the basis of issue voting was limited, compared to other issues. When we asked voters how important the abortion issue was to them in general, we also asked about the general importance of three other political issues in Virginia and five in New Jersey. The abortion issue ranked near the bottom for all voters, both men and women (Figure 1-12).

Figure 1-11:
Importance of Abortion Issue
in Hypothetical Voting Decisions

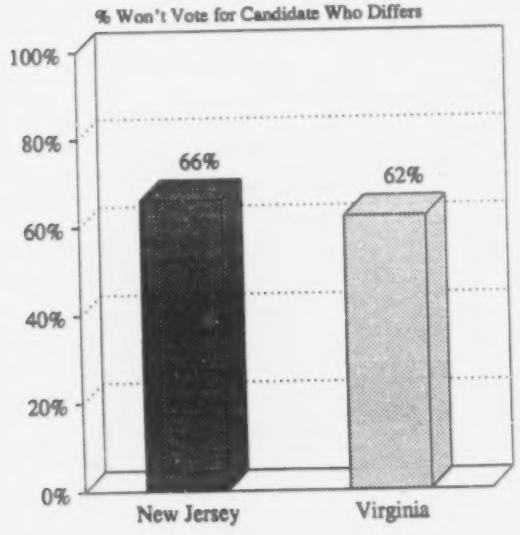
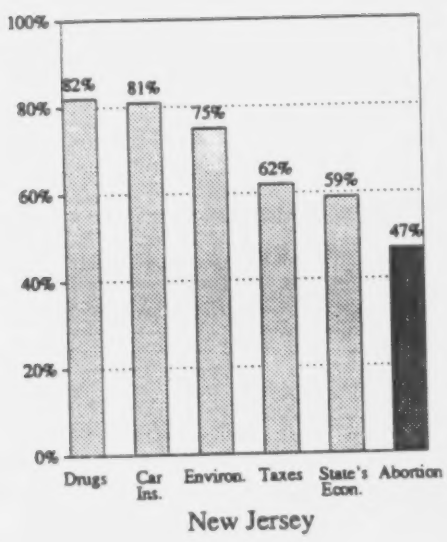
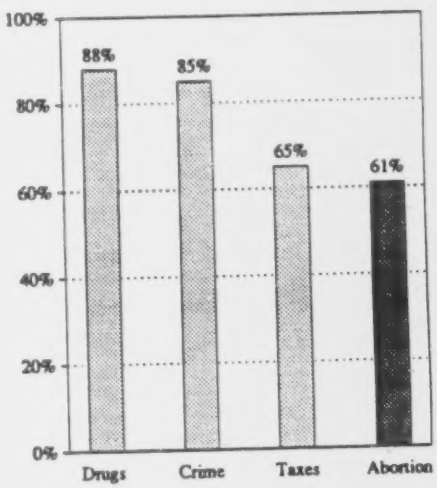


Figure 1-12:
General Importance of Abortion Issue
Compared to Other Issues




New Jersey




Virginia

Virginia voters were most likely to see the drug problem and crime as very important, with taxation in third place and abortion following closely in last place. In New Jersey, voters were asked to rank order the importance of six issues: the environment, automobile insurance, abortion, taxes, the state's economy, and drugs. The drug problem and the highly publicized automobile insurance crisis were considered the most important issues, named as very important by at least four out of five voters. Environmental issues, taxes, and economic conditions in the state took third, fourth, and fifth places. By comparison, abortion was least likely to be ranked as a very important issue.[9] Thus, while the issue was important to many voters in the abstract, other issues appeared to have relatively more potential to motivate more voters. The campaigns would play critical roles in influencing which of these issue concerns (if any) voters would link with legislative and gubernatorial votes.

## ATTITUDES TOWARD ACTIVIST GROUPS

There was concern among many pro-choice officeholders and pro-choice loyalists about the ability of the pro-choice movement to reinvigorate itself in the wake of *Webster*. There was also a parallel concern, spawned by negative media images such as flag burning by abortion rights protesters, that led some to fear that pro-choice activists might damage their own credibility among the voters, acquiring an "extremist" label. Pro-life candidates had a similar concern, with the nightly news often flashing images of Operation Rescue participants being carted off to jail.

In both states there was support for pro-choice groups and far less support for pro-life groups. Sixty-two percent of New Jersey voters and 63% of Virginia voters thought favorably of "groups that want abortion to remain legal," compared with only

[9]Earlier discussion of gender difference in general importance attributed to the issue showed that the abortion issue in the abstract was evidently a much more important political issue to women than to men in both states. However, the issue still ranked lowest in relative importance among both women and men in New Jersey (6th of six issues) and among Virginia men (4th of four issues). Among Virginia women the issue was third in importance.

22% of New Jerseyans and 27% of Virginians who favored "groups that want to outlaw abortion."[10]

A comparison of attitudes toward pro-choice and pro-life groups taking into account scores on our pro-life/pro-choice index, shows that in the lowest three groups (i.e., among voters who gave two or fewer pro-choice responses out of seven) voters are more favorable than unfavorable toward pro-life groups and more unfavorable than favorable toward pro-choice groups (Figure 1-13). However, views transition at point three on the index. At that point and higher on the pro-choice scale (i.e., those giving three or more pro-choice responses) favorable attitudes towards pro-choice groups begin to outweigh unfavorable responses, and unfavorable attitudes toward pro-life groups begin to outweigh favorable responses. This is not good news for pro-life groups, because most voters in both states scored at least three on the scale. In Virginia, about 70% of the voters responded with scores of three or higher on the pro-choice scale, while only 30% scored in the three lowest categories. In New Jersey, three out of four (76%) gave at least 3 pro-choice responses to the seven questions, leaving only 24% with scores of 2 or less (see Figure 1-2).

The reason for this image advantage for pro-choice groups — even among those with mixed feelings on abortion — is not clear. Pro-life groups would undoubtedly point to their portrayal in the media and the framing of the issue. One pro-life legislator summed it up as follows:

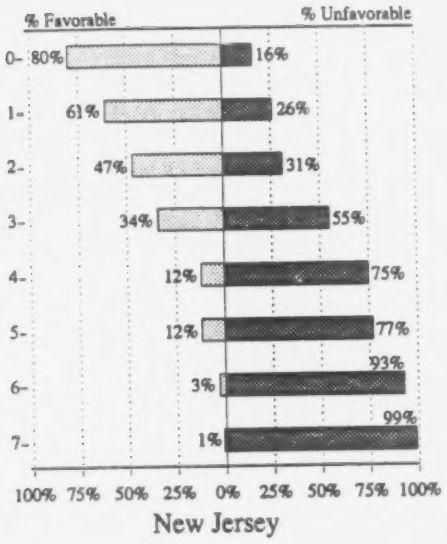
> *I think they [pro-life groups] are losing the issue and I'm not sure why. I think if they want to turn it around they're going to have to try harder to get their views out to media and opinion leaders and others in a more thoughtful way.*

---

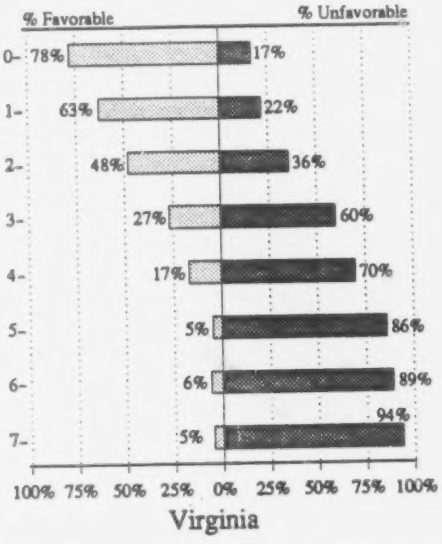
[10]Ideally we would have asked the voters about their views regarding "pro-choice" and "pro-life" groups, using the labels each side uses for itself. Unfortunately, voters were ill-equipped to cope with this level of sophistication in question wording. Indeed, only 52% of Virginians and 54% of New Jerseyans could accurately state whether pro-choice groups favored or opposed restrictions, and only 51% of both states' respondents could accurately determine where pro-life groups stood regarding restrictions. Therefore, we were forced to use question wording that might not reflect the labels that these groups prefer, but which refer to meanings of those labels.

## Figure 1-13:
## Attitudes Toward Activist Groups
## Given Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index Score

### Pro-Life Groups

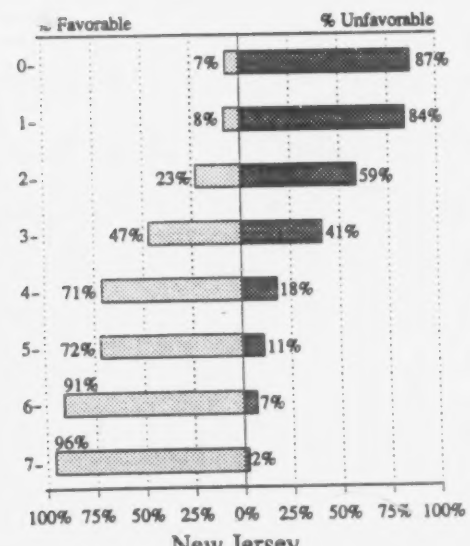



New Jersey

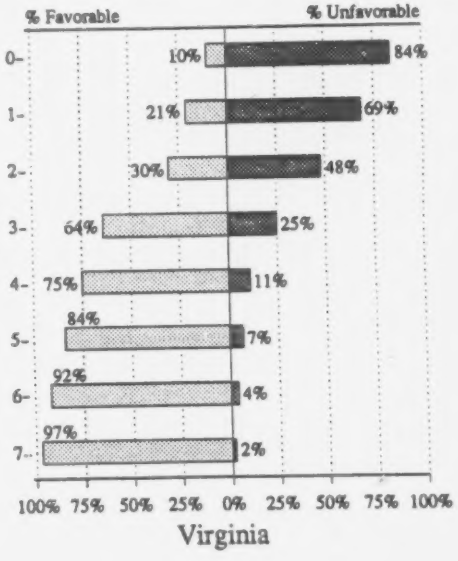



Virginia

### Pro-Choice Groups




New Jersey




Virginia

A pro-life activist saw the problem as being rooted in a possible media bias toward seeing the issue in terms of "choice":

> *We have found the media to be slanted, to be biased toward the pro-abortion forces.... [One paper] issued an in-house memorandum for the editorial staff, directing their reporters to use the phrase[s] pro-choice and anti-abortion. That's an attempt to create a mind-set out there in the public. In other words, pro-choice is American.... They want the picture to come across that these people are not pro-abortion, they're pro-choice. Which is a noble thing instead of an ignoble thing such as killing a baby.... That's a severe bias because they have people tongue-tied.... Politically what it comes down to is the people, the electorate, get a message. And the message they're getting is that they are upholding our American way of life when they pull the lever, like voting for somebody ...who espouses the abortion position and this right-to-choose. It has political impact. The swaying of the public mind has political consequences.*

The most striking difference between the states is that ambivalent voters (scoring a 3 or 4 on the scale of 0 to 7) in Virginia are more likely than their New Jersey counterparts to be favorable toward pro-choice groups. In both states, the margin of favorable attitudes over unfavorable attitudes toward these groups becomes progressively larger as scores on the pro-life/pro-choice scale increase (become more pro-choice). However, the progressions are faster and the margins are larger in the "mushy middle" in Virginia than in New Jersey. This tendency for conflicted voters in Virginia to feel more favorable toward pro-choice groups than their New Jersey counterparts was unexpected, given the cautious attitude Virginia legislators — especially outside of northern Virginia — expressed about association with either group.

The nature of the campaigns in the two states may be responsible for the more favorable attitudes that the ambivalent voters in Virginia expressed toward pro-choice activists. As the next chapter will explain, the Virginia campaigns were often focused on a libertarian theme — framing the issue in terms of the role of government and individual freedom. This was much more frequently alluded to and defined as the issue by Virginia pro-choice candidates and activists. Although New Jersey pro-choice candidates and activists spoke in terms of "choice," they made more frequent references than their Virginia counterparts to women and women's rights. Like the voters, many pro-choice candidates were less comfortable talking about abortion than talking about individual rights. The opposite was true for pro-life candidates.

While some may be disconcerted by the low profile that "choice" arguments and libertarian themes give to women as a group or to concerns about women's equality, many candidates (particularly in Virginia) felt that the issue would have been lost had they used such themes. As one feminist Virginia legislator notes:

> *I'd say, knock off the coat hangers, knock off the rest of those types of techniques because the great center portion of people are not comfortable with that kind of approach. They are comfortable with recognizing that government doesn't have a place in these kinds of issues.*

And other legislative candidates concurred:

> *I don't think it would have worked as a feminist issue.... I mean clearly pro-choice is a women's rights issue.... [However] I think if they'd made it as a feminist pitch, I don't think that would have been too effective.* (Virginia pro-life Republican)

Others thought the message got through to women even in its seemingly non-gendered fashion, as this Virginia pro-choice leaning Democrat explained:

> *One of the things that persuaded us [to go with the pro-choice message] was the question of the individual rights.... The issue...appealed to a lot of different groups at different levels. For example, I had grandmothers stop me and say, "Man, I have been told all of my life what I'm supposed to do and I don't want anybody else telling me even now what I can do with my body." I had young people saying, "Look, what I do with my morals and is my business. And the only safe way is to avoid relationships altogether and the good Lord didn't put us here for that." Even other people that were mothers would say, "My husband has told me what I have to do all of my life...and I don't need somebody else telling me what to do." ...A lot of different people identified with different aspects of that issue.*

# CONCLUSION

In New Jersey and Virginia, each state's political culture interacted with its citizens' attitudes regarding the general and relative importance of the abortion issue to set the context for the 1989 campaigns. Just as the *Webster* decision, media reaction, and voters' demographics and political orientations influenced whether or not voters would see the abortion issue as generally important, so too did these factors have an impact on how the issue "played" in particular elections. Whether those voters generally concerned about the abortion issue would connect concern for the issue with voting decisions in the gubernatorial and legislative races depended on several factors. They include campaign media, issue group and party activity, the different campaigns' abilities to frame the issue and convey their messages, and the voters themselves.

The election for governor will be discussed in the next chapter, followed by a chapter on legislative campaigns. In both chapters, we address the impact of the abortion issue on candidates and their campaigns, the conditions under which voters generally interested in the abortion issue translate that concern into an issue vote, and the potential for representative government on this issue in the post-*Webster* era.

# CHAPTER 2:
# THE GUBERNATORIAL RACES

*The New Jersey gubernatorial campaign...along with Virginia...were the first two campaigns post-*Webster.... *The environment and the issue were dramatically changed with the Supreme Court decision.... They were proving grounds, they were tests, case studies. The candidates were guinea pigs on what you can do that will help you win elections, how you can deal with the abortion issue that will help you win elections and how you can deal with it poorly that will not help you.* (Courter campaign activist)

*In an election you lose by 7,000 votes, you point to anything as a decisive point.... If the* Webster *decision had not come down we would have won that election.* (Coleman campaign activist)

## INTRODUCTION

The public's general interest in the abortion issue was high following *Webster*. However, there was no guarantee that voters would link their concern with it to their voting decisions in the gubernatorial races or that it would have an effect on the campaigns. However, the differences between the candidates' stands on the issue initially suggested that it could become campaign-relevant.[1]

In both states, the Republican candidates (former Attorney General J. Marshall Coleman of Virginia and Congressman James Courter of New Jersey) were associated with the pro-life position. Coleman favored allowing abortion only if the life of the mother was threatened, and Courter, prior to *Webster*, had favored banning abortion, except in cases of rape, incest, or threat to the life of the mother. Courter would later attempt to shift away from this view. Their respective Democratic opponents (Lieutenant Governor Douglas Wilder of Virginia and Congressman James Florio of New Jersey) were pro-choice, with Wilder qualifying his position by endorsing the idea of parental consent.

While *Webster* did not guarantee that abortion policy would be an issue in the 1989 gubernatorial elections, there are at least four reasons why *Webster* increased the probability that the issue would affect what happened during the campaigns and ultimately voters' decisions on election day:

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[1]Virginia also held elections for lieutenant governor and attorney general. In both cases, abortion probably had an impact. For a discussion of these particular elections see, Larry Sabato, "Virginia's National Election for Governor — 1989." University of Virginia, 1989.

- **By returning some power to the states to regulate abortion, the decision increased the relevance of the issue to the gubernatorial race, creating the *potential* for increased voter interest and creating the need for candidates to respond.** This view was prevalent among both New Jersey and Virginia activists:

  *Abortion was likely to be an issue regardless of whether the* Webster *decision had come up or not, but it...probably would have been a much less effective campaign strategy without* Webster. (Wilder campaign activist)

  *Had* Webster *not happened, I think the big difference would have been that the issue would not have been as visible. It would not have been as much in the forefront of the voters' minds in Virginia.* (Virginia pro-choice activist)

  *Choice would not have been a predominant issue in the campaign were it not for the* Webster *decision. I think that over the years people had become very complacent about the right to choice. That complacency by virtue of* Roe v. Wade *had become an expected freedom, as the right to speak and vote and all of the other rights that we enjoy in this country [are]. I think when* Webster *was handed down, that people for the first time in fifteen, sixteen years really felt threatened with losing a right that they had come to expect. And that fear really brought out in a lot of people a deeper thinking about that issue than they had previously done.* (Florio campaign activist)

- **By redefining the legal status of abortion, the decision galvanized pro-choice activists and sympathizers.** This could affect issue groups' campaign resources, the types of pressures the candidates felt, the information that voters received, and the way the issue was covered by the media. This point of view was supported by comments from both the pro-choice and pro-life sides in New Jersey as well as in Virginia:

  *The political landscape in this country...changed pretty much 180 degrees. The...sleeping pro-choice giant woke up during that time. It became much easier to mobilize people. People were more likely to give money to NARAL [the National Abortion Rights Action League] and our affiliates and actually join. And what we saw during last year is that the national membership base doubled. All of our affiliate members, which is a separate membership base, doubled. Our*

*national budget increased 300 percent over the last year.* (NARAL activist, Virginia)

*For years it had been such a quiet movement that there was not that kind of energy in the pro-choice movement for so long. And I think that people probably questioned whether one could have that kind of energy again. So it was a surprise in a sense that almost overnight you were able, it was just like someone flipped on the light and there was all of this activity.* (Florio campaign activist)

*When* Webster *occurred...a lot of people out there who regard this as a right to abortion, a defensible right or an important thing in their life, decided to say, hey, wow, we've got to get active.... And there was very definitely an awakening of pro-abortion people.... No question about it.... It's a real thing, the mobilization [of pro-abortion groups].... We [organized pro-life groups] picked up support [following* Webster*]. We picked up a lot of people who were on the fence or quiet and inactive and it made some people active who were not active, supportive who were not supportive.* (New Jersey pro-life activist)

*I think* Webster *was a great motivating factor for the pro-abortion side.... I really believe that prior to* Webster, *that the pro-aborts believed this issue was dead, it was over, they had won and the battle was over, and they didn't have to do anything. And this decision came down and they realized that it wasn't over. It was moving away and not in their direction. So they were able to motivate the people that support their position through that. They were afraid...our people were harder to motivate because...they saw this [*Webster *decision] as a victory and they didn't think we had to really work on it that much.* (Virginia pro-life activist)

- **It made the issue "newsworthy," thereby generating media attention not only about the substantive stands, but also about how the issue was being handled.** This media coverage helped prime the voters to think about the connection between the race for governor and state policy on abortion. This view was shared by activists in both states but was expressed more adamantly by those involved in the campaign in Virginia. As one Coleman activist noted:

*[After* Webster*] I'm absolutely clear that it was the national media attention which was the decisive key.... Any issue that is on the evening news two or three times a week becomes a major issue in the*

*minds of the people.... Every time you had a press story, it always revolved around abortion, it focused on it. They were continually questioning him [Coleman] about it. It became the big issue, it became the thing that people discussed over cocktails. It became the thing that you talked about at the lunch break at work. And that created a focus of, well there's an election going on, where do these candidates stand?*

- **The timing of the *Webster* decision was critical — a condition that will not be applicable to the 1990 campaigns.** The candidates had sought and won nomination in pre-*Webster* primaries, but had to campaign in a post-*Webster* general election. Coming just after the primaries and at the beginning of the general election, the decision left the Republican candidates who had had long histories of supporting pro-life policies in the difficult position of having to deal with the new political terrain. They had little time to adjust, and might have handled it more deftly had they not had to respond in the midst of a campaign. Finally, coming down as it did in the middle of an election year, the decision certainly piqued interest at a critical time for politicians in these two states.

*Certainly abortion would not have been as enormously written about as it was, because...if it had been [handed down in] 1988, people would have known exactly where they stood and been comfortable with whatever that stand was going to be. Certainly legislative candidates and elected officials on that level would have known if it had been in 1988. If it had been 1990, it would not have been an issue.... It just would have gone away.* Webster *came down in the middle of a very hotly contested race in our state. Because New Jersey and Virginia were the only two having races it was easy to focus time and money on our states.* (New Jersey Republican activist)

*[Without* Webster*] There would not have been nearly as much press attention paid to the issue. They just would not have focused on it... There would not have been the opportunity for Mr. Courter to be inarticulate on the subject. He would have kept saying what he had been saying all along.... Up to that time, he felt that governors really didn't play much of a role in abortion and so there was no need to really comment on it. But post-*Webster*...both Jim Florio and Jim Courter had to come up with the answers to new questions, one of them being parental notification and another being parental consent...and a whole host of other things that grew out of* Webster. *The press attention and the need to come up with new answers to new*

*questions changed the face of the issue for the candidates.* (Courter campaign activist)

*If at the end of the primary we had been in a position which was, "He opposes abortion except for rape, incest, and life of the mother" — if that had been our position at the end of the primary, I believe we could have weathered the storm of the* Webster *decision. Our problem was that we were very vocal publicly about what Marshall's personal position is, which is that it's only life of the mother. And because we had done that and done it strongly in the primary, there were just lots and lots and lots of quotes that people could use in a general election against us. And they would not have been effective except for the* Webster *decision. That would not have been a decisive issue.* (Coleman campaign activist)

## THE IMPACT ON CAMPAIGN DYNAMICS

The abortion issue haunted candidates in both states. Its potential impact on the election outcomes has been debated by campaign observers. In Virginia, where Wilder won by less than half a percentage point, many have argued that Wilder's pro-choice message made the difference or that Coleman's failure to staunchly defend the pro-life position was responsible for his narrow defeat. In New Jersey, Florio's 24 point margin of victory was so great that many question whether abortion could be considered important at all. For all the debate, it is clear that the issue did affect campaign dynamics in both states.

### IMPACT ON CANDIDATES' CAMPAIGN MESSAGES

In New Jersey, Florio, the pro-choice Democratic candidate, issued a strongly worded pro-choice statement immediately following the *Webster* decision:

*Today's ruling turns back the clock in a way that is disappointing to me and fundamentally contrary to the notion of personal privacy. Abortion is a terribly difficult decision, but it should be up to a woman to decide, not the state legislature of New Jersey or other state legislatures.* (*Home News*, 7/4/89, p. A-2)

Florio campaign activists saw their preparedness and clarity in dealing with the issue as crucial.

> *What was key for Governor Florio was that he had a very clear statement, very quickly on the heels of* Webster. *Within an hour he was out with a clear, concise statement saying he supported a woman's right to choose and that was where he had always been. And that while he had gone through an evolution for the last five or six years, that evolution had really been completed. And that came through. So you saw what happens when you have a strong clear position and one where you don't know or try to finesse it.... You certainly saw how the contrast works, so that many Republican women who felt strongly about choice in light of* Webster *supported Governor Florio.* (Florio campaign activist)

Florio felt comfortable with his pro-choice position, which emphasized the importance of individual freedom, but this was not the case with his opponent. Courter, who had unsuccessfully sought the endorsement of a pro-life PAC in the primary and signed the *amicus curiae* brief submitted to the Supreme Court by members of Congress endorsing the pro-life position in the *Webster* case, now found himself on the "wrong" side of an emerging issue. Prior to *Webster*, he had been very clearly pro-life:

> *During the past 11 years since I have been a Member of Congress, I've taken the pro-life position. I don't apologize. I have very strong beliefs with respect to that, and if I am handed a piece of legislation and it is consistent with my position which is well-known and has been very consistent for the past 11 years, I will sign it. If it is inconsistent with that pro-life position, obviously I will not.* (League of Women Voters Republican Primary Debate, Rutgers University, May, 1989)

Nevertheless, Courter's initial statement after *Webster* declared no substantive response:

> *I will withhold comment until I have had adequate time to review completely this decision. This is a complicated and emotional issue that should be addressed without heated rhetoric.* (*Home News*, 7/4/89, p. A-2)

While the media actively pursued his reaction, Courter waited two days before issuing his first substantive statement on the issue, saying:

> *I am not going to be pro-active on this issue. If [pro-choice] advocates roll up their sleeves to try to defeat me, so be it.... Most New Jerseyans are comfortable with the status quo.* (*Home News*, 7/6/89, pp. A-1, A-2).

Subsequent Courter statements included the following:

> *My feeling is there should be no modification in the law in New Jersey.... It is not one of my priorities.... I imagine there are a number of people in New Jersey who take the position that I do that abortion should be permitted only under certain circumstances.* (*Star Ledger*, 7/6/89, p. 14)

> *With respect to abortion, there is not yet consensus in the state.... [I would wait] to find out what comes out of the debate [in the legislature].* (*Home News*, 7/8/89, p. A-2)

Courter was viewed as waffling over the course of the next few weeks, and indeed throughout the entire campaign, based on such seemingly contradictory statements as:

> *I'm not going to be an advocate for changing the law of the state of New Jersey because there is no consensus that I see whatever to change what we have.* (*The Record*, p. A-3, 7/21/89)

> *I would only sign a law if it was consistent with the constitution, and the constitution in New Jersey protects a woman's right to access to abortion.* (*The Record*, p. A-3, 7/21/89)

> *I am personally opposed to abortion except in the cases of rape, incest, or when the pregnancy endangers the life of the mother.* (*The [Trenton] Times*, 8/24/89, p. A-1)

> *The New Jersey Constitution has been interpreted by the New Jersey Supreme Court to guarantee a woman's unrestricted access to abortion. As governor I will uphold the Constitution and not simply impose my personal views on the women of New Jersey. As Governor, I will sign legislation put forward by the state legislature that would require parental notification prior to a minor receiving an abortion. As a matter of common sense, I fundamentally disagree with Jim*

> *Florio, Molly Yard, and the National Abortion Rights Action League that minors under the age of 18 should simply be able to receive an abortion without their parents' or legal guardians' knowledge.* (*The [Trenton] Times*, 8/24/89, p. A-1)

> *People know what my position is over the years — I have been quite consistent.* (*News Tribune*, 10/23/89, p. A-3)

> *My personal position has been consistent for years. I've said abortion should be permitted under some circumstances — not all circumstances.* (*The Record*, 10/26/89, p. A-3)

Courter was criticized by the pro-life groups, and in fact by many observers and party activists, for shifting positions on the issue. While some believed he would have been much better off maintaining a clear pro-life stance, some campaign and party activists' remarks indicate the politically difficult position in which the abortion issue seemed to place Courter, given his pre-*Webster* pro-life stance.

> *He [Courter] couldn't have done things differently, or much differently than he did. Maybe be firm so there was no perception of waffling, but he had an opinion that he believed in. He got attacked for changing his stance a little bit. Florio had changed his stance just a little bit further down the line. So, I'm not sure anything could have been done differently.* (New Jersey Republican activist)

It seemed that the new post-*Webster* environment had forced Courter to re-evaluate his pro-life views, resulting in a redefinition of his position toward the pro-choice side in the middle of the campaign. If the Courter campaign could convince the voters that Courter did not differ sharply from Florio and had truly changed, then abortion would not be an issue. If this effort was unsuccessful, voters might either continue to presume Courter was pro-life or begin to doubt his integrity.

Courter's handling of the issue brought him a great deal of media attention, which ordinarily might have been valuable to a candidate who was down 17 points in June,[2] but it was almost without exception negative. The problem seemed to stem not only from his changing position, but from his frequent denial that he *had* actually changed; ultimately the shifts themselves, on this and other issues, became campaign issues. The abortion issue became not only a substantive policy question but a character issue as well. As one Florio activist observed:

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[2] *Star Ledger*/Eagleton Poll, conducted June 12-20, 1989, press release June 25, 1989.

> *We were at times surprised at the amount of attention that the media was giving to the issue.... You wonder if Congressman Courter had staked out a position early and stuck to that position, whether the news media would have put the kind of attention that they put on it. I think what really piqued their continued interest in this was not just it was an issue nationally and something that the electorate was interested in. But it became more of a character issue, with, "What does this guy really believe? Is what he's saying today going to be in fact what he says when he gets in office?" And the inconsistencies in his filing in the amicus brief on the* Webster *case, and then starting to try and move away from that very quickly within a period of just a few weeks. And the fact that he insisted on a couple of occasions to the press that he had not changed his position, when as they aptly pointed out they had news reels that showed that he had changed his position...we had no way of clearly planning for that happening. And we were as fascinated I think as anyone else was in watching this drama play out.* (Florio campaign activist)

Meanwhile, Florio was subtly modifying his position in a way that would minimize the probability of being painted as a "left wing liberal." He issued a statement in July implying that he might consider legislation mandating parental notification for a minor's abortion, were it to come to his desk during his administration.

Despite Florio's limited retreat from a pure pro-choice stand, by the end of July the pro-choice activists had vowed to make New Jersey a test case for a winning pro-choice strategy. National pro-life groups were not as vocal about their intentions in the state, and a Courter campaign activist thought that their apparent lack of action in the New Jersey race was intentional.

> *I think that the pro-life forces stayed away from this race intentionally because they didn't want to be presented as losing the race. They wanted Jim Courter to lose and not pro-life to lose, and so there was a deliberate attempt, at least on the national level, I'm not saying on the state level, but at least on the national level, to stay away from the New Jersey gubernatorial race from the national pro-life forces.*

While Courter was shifting away from his pro-life position, thereby giving pro-life activists even less incentive to remain involved, the pro-life candidate in Virginia, Republican J. Marshall Coleman, was holding fast to the staunch pro-life position he had advocated throughout the primary season. Like Courter, he faced the

difficulty of being a nominee from the pre-*Webster* era seeking to win a post-*Webster* general election. Coleman's opposition to abortion except in the case of threat to the life of the mother would become an easy target for his Democratic pro-choice opponent, as one Republican party activist observed.

> *I think the position that some pro-lifers take that abortions should not be allowed in cases of rape or incest is politically the most dangerous position they could take, because an awful lot of people who don't like abortion see nothing wrong with allowing it in those cases.... At least maybe within the first eight weeks, ten weeks, twelve weeks. I think Coleman, allowing Wilder to focus on that aspect of his position was a mistake and there came a point when he was asked, if the General Assembly passed a bill outlawing abortion in the case of rape or incest, would you sign the bill? And he wouldn't say one way or the other. He sort of dodged around it.... I would have answered that question one way or the other. I would just flat out answer it, yes or no.... If you're going to say yes then say, "That bill's not going to pass unless half the Delegates and half the Senators vote for it, and that means the people want it. So I'm not going to sign it until the people say they want it."*

For Coleman, the effort to adjust meant softening his previous pledges to outlaw abortion in all cases except when the life of the mother was in danger. As one Coleman activist explained: "We made the one change which was that we were not going to pursue changing the law in regards to rape and incest." This apparent shift had ramifications beyond the substantive issue.

> *The conventional wisdom, for what it's worth, if you can get away with it once, you can't get away with it twice. Coleman changed positions. Coleman's position back in the seventies was basically pro-choice and he acknowledged a change in position.... He had a problem in the numbers and he had a problem with public perception as being an opportunist to begin with. So, if he was someone who had a reputation for holding fast in principle, then the voters would certainly forgive him on one position when he's held steady on the other fifteen. But Coleman had a reputation, deserved or otherwise, he had a reputation of being an opportunist, of swishing with the wind, of being a moderate turned conservative turned whatever was necessary to win that week, so one more shift and that just would have led to another round of stories of you can't trust Coleman.* (Virginia Republican activist)

> *What we found in some of our follow-up polling...was not only did pro-choice people disagree with Marshall Coleman's position on the issue, but it became an integrity issue and an honesty issue as well. When Coleman started to try and dance around a little bit, people just felt like he could not be trusted. And I think some of the stuff that [Republican National Committee Chairman Lee] Atwater had been saying about decide your position and stick to it is good advice whether you are a pro-choice candidate or an anti-choice candidate.*
> (Pro-choice activist)

Meanwhile, the Coleman campaign's difficulties with the issue merged with fortuitous timing to aid the Wilder campaign, as this Wilder campaign activist explained:

> *There has grown up an argument that says Doug Wilder won in Virginia because of the abortion issue. That's not accurate. In fact, it's really a two-step process which, first Doug Wilder won in the state of Virginia because he had over the course of his career come to convince voters he was qualified and able to be governor. And then as a second step on the way to victory, he was able to...focus the campaign on a very hot political issue which was partly a factor of time with the Webster decision and partly a factor of his opponent's positioning on the issue, which was really even a step further to the right than George Bush's. He [Wilder] got out early with a solid position. He put his opponent on the defensive. He kept him there. He made a gutsy call on using the issue in conjunction with the new mainstream...arguments. He took a gutsy issue and an early call to do the TV in September when people were saying, "Wait." He didn't answer on the charges from Coleman on crime because he knew it wouldn't stick. And he put his money into the abortion thing. And then at the first debate he turned Coleman's opening around on him and hammered him with it, and dominated that debate in the news coverage for weeks afterwards.*

Despite the potential for the issue to have an effect on the campaigns, there was certainly no guarantee. Perhaps one of the biggest unknowns associated with the impact of the Court's decision was how long the fallout might last, as one disgruntled pro-life activist explained, recounting his conversations with the Coleman campaign:

> *[The Coleman people said] it's going to go away. Wilder's making some hay on his TV ads right now but it's going to be a flash in the pan, it's going to be over, and then we're going to overtake him on other issues.*

One Wilder activist observed:

> *At first they ignored the issue and opted not to engage on the issue at all for, I would bet, three to four weeks. Then after realizing that in fact it was costing them votes, they tried to engage the issue. And they did it in the first televised debate where Coleman used it as the basis of the focus of his opening statement.... He said that Wilder was trying to flame people's fears on the issue. And that also proved ineffective. And then in the third step, they tried to make a case that in fact Wilder's record on women's issues was not particularly good. And I think that strategy failed as well.... I think it was their inability to make a decision about how to handle the issue that had much more effect on us than the right-to-life groups.*

But the issue would not go away.

Immediately after the *Webster* decision, the pro-choice groups were ready to wash their hands of any involvement with Wilder. Although disputed by some members of Wilder's campaign staff, at least one reporter declared that the Democratic nominee had initially denounced the notion of abortion as a form of "birth control." While Wilder later backed away from such an alleged statement, ultimately stating his support for a woman's right to choose, he tempered his support for the "choice" position by stating that he would support parental consent. This led the pro-choice groups to declare initially that they would not become involved in the Virginia gubernatorial race; the national groups would focus their energies on New Jersey, and the local groups would focus their energies on lower level races. One Republican activist gave his perspective:

> *I think that the pro-choice forces nationally chose this particular race [New Jersey] not only because it was one of the two gubernatorial races in the country, but because they knew it was a race they probably would win. It's like choosing a front runner in a sporting event. You know that by choosing the front runner you're more likely to be successful.*

Wilder did not wait for the pro-choice groups to back him — he began to use the issue aggressively. Ultimately the pro-choice groups did become active in both states. Why there was a change of heart was less clear.

> *They [pro-choice groups] were not trying to be helpful in the beginning.... Eventually they came around and I'm not exactly sure what changed their mind. And NARAL put in a lot of money on TV commercials and obviously that had to be helpful.* (Wilder campaign activist)

> *Part of our problem with Wilder...initially [was] in the past we have not endorsed or worked for candidates that were not one hundred percent pure on the issue. And Florio successfully dodged the parental consent issue throughout the campaign and did not come down [in] one place. Doug Wilder, as we know, supports restricted minors' access as legislation, and stated that publicly. So that was definitely a concern for us on the front end.... We weren't sure if we could do two big races, so we got involved in New Jersey initially. It became pretty apparent that our message was catching on, our organizing efforts were going to catch on, and Florio was going to be pretty safe or pretty safely win. It was just a matter of what the margin was. Sort of at that point Wilder started to come up a little bit in the numbers as well. And our fund raising went better than we had expected it to go.... Around August/September we started taking a look at the Wilder race and getting involved in that race as well.* (Pro-choice activist)

Abortion became an issue in the New Jersey campaign not so much because the pro-choice candidate pursued it, but because others — the activist groups and the media — kept the issue in the public eye, and kept their activities centered around the gubernatorial candidates. The low profile the Florio campaign gave the issue is clear from this discussion with an activist from that camp:

> Q: *Did you use the abortion issue in your campaign literature?*
> A: *No I don't think we did.*
> Q: *Did you run any commercials?*
> A: *Yes. One of our commercials I believe mentioned it but did not highlight it. But [it] did...mention the right-to-choose issue.*

While they were active in both states, the pro-choice activists filled what might be considered a void in campaign messages transmitted by the Florio campaign (as least relative to the messages that Wilder sent and that were being sent by others about Courter and Coleman). Defending their more limited use of the issue, one Florio activist responded:

> *This campaign was not about issues that were manufactured. There happened to be real issues in this election that the people want to hear about.... We didn't make this [abortion] issue [important]. People made this issue [important]. The people care about this issue.... That's why I think you saw the dramatic difference. Because the way the two candidates ended up lining up on these critical issues.*

One Courter activist concurred in the pro-choice activists' importance in shaping the debate, noting:

> *I don't know how active the pro-choice forces were in Virginia, but they were very active here.... They called press conferences often during July and August...plus they had paid media, they had radio commercials.*

While the Florio campaign may have chosen to talk about the abortion issue less frequently than other topics, such as the environment and auto insurance, and certainly less than Wilder did in Virginia, the Courter and Coleman campaigns had no choice but to talk about it. This seems to have had a profound impact on the agenda of issues they could address and the resulting messages that the campaigns were able to send to voters. Both Coleman and Courter supporters felt like media victims, feeling the media made it difficult to refocus away from the abortion issue:

> *We thought it was critically important to move the debate from social issues such as abortion and AIDS and those kinds of things to issues like taxes, government spending, auto insurance,...the environment. Even though we thought that Florio had better credentials on the environment, we would still rather talk about the environment than we would about abortion. And so we tried at every turn. I mean I don't think Jim Courter ever called a press conference, at least when I was there, to talk about abortion. We tried to focus on taxes.... But the press corps, again mostly here in Trenton, said...that's not an issue.* (Courter campaign activist)

> *You'd go out and have another agenda to be covered. For example, we'd go out and have a news conference on crime, which we did quite often. And the media, of course, would show up. However, they would cover your event but they were there to ask other questions, on abortion. And more or less not only a national press corps but the state press corps was clamoring on the abortion issue. And I have to say that NARAL...was very effective in keeping media interest high on the issue.... The continuous piles of press releases attacking Courter*

*and allowing other various angles of the argument to be put forward.... They were very effective. The Right-to-Life people were alienated by the new Courter position. So, in effect, the Right-to-Life people ended up sitting on their hands while NARAL folks...had a field day.* (Courter campaign activist)

*Every time you had a press story...[it] led with abortion, it revolved around abortion, it focused on it, they were continually questioning him on it, when in fact there was no change in his position.... I think that we would have not been successful in painting him [Wilder] as an extremist on the issue. And I think what we tried to do, which was undermine his basic trustworthiness, was more, I think that was more effective. And I think it did succeed in about two-thirds of the state. In northern Virginia it didn't. That's where I think the media was decisive, in fact, was in northern Virginia. Because in other parts of the state we had alternative methods of getting our message across. In northern Virginia there was almost no alternative.... You have one dominant newspaper which is The Washington Post. The small weeklies, suburban dailies...they're not read for news coverage basically.... You had the TV stations in northern Virginia which didn't cover the election...until the last two weeks. And what stories they did, played off of abortion. And part of that is because the Washington TV stations are responsible for Maryland, Virginia, and D.C. news. And they play more D.C. news than anything else.* (Coleman campaign activist)

It seems fairly clear that the abortion issue became important in the gubernatorial campaign in Virginia not so much because the activists chose to make it important (as in New Jersey), but rather because the Democratic campaign chose to emphasize it. Campaign activists on both sides acknowledge the candidate's role:

*There were TV advertisements from NARAL. And there were obviously letters that they sent around. And there were some other things. And I think they clearly played a role. But again, I think that this was a pretty much of a campaign-oriented dominated debate on abortion.... Coleman's people were hitting us on crime. We were hitting them on abortion. And in this business, you have to decide whether you're going to make your case or defend. You don't win them defensive. So we decided that, look we're going to make our case on abortion. We're going to run this ad for two weeks.... They didn't answer it. They hit us on crime for two weeks. We didn't answer them. That's "eyeball to eyeball, pupil missile crisis." And everybody wakes up in a week, two weeks, and takes a poll. We were right, they were wrong. They should have answered us. We didn't have to answer them. They*

> *were behind the curve, didn't quite know what to do. Floundered around, tried to come back on some other issues.... They made two or three or four tactical mistakes that constantly allowed us to raise the abortion issue, make the mainstream versus the old guard argument and it was really selling by the end of October.* (Wilder campaign activist)

> *It could be that since Wilder was able to conduct name calling and he did it first, I think what happened was that it alienated those two-thirds of the voters who do not particularly care all that much about abortion.... Wilder was able to come out with verbal guns blazing and say "This guy is an extremist. He's backed by extremists. I'm not. I'm mainstream."* (Coleman campaign activist)

As Wilder's prospects improved and as he increasingly emphasized the abortion issue and stressed his pro-choice perspective, the pro-choice groups with whom he had an initially rocky relationship ultimately endorsed him and even worked diligently to help him win.

It seems fair to say that, were we to step back in time ten, five, or perhaps even two years, it would seem startling that a pro-choice candidate would not only take a clear stand on abortion, but also use that issue and emphasize it, especially in a southern state that was once part of the Confederacy. The significance of issue definition, or framing, for gaining mass support for a candidate's position was not lost on the candidates or the activists in either state, and especially not in Virginia.

> *It all depends on the definition that the issue has in the voters' minds. And I think that if voters are asked to focus on the question of whether or not government should be making this decision, it is a strong tendency towards the side that says government should not make that decision. But if people are asked to focus on either whether they approve or disapprove of abortion itself, or if the issue can be focused on some specific question such as parental consent, notification, those kinds of questions, then it could be a very different issue. And I think the pro-choice people are right to say that under the argument of privacy, they really have a very strong argument to make.... The simple fact is that right now the argument having to do with government intervention and privacy is the prominent one. And much less so is the question of approval or disapproval of abortion itself.* (Wilder campaign activist)

One Wilder activist explained the challenge they faced in Virginia:

> *If you dominate a debate there are...three things you need. One, you need a skillful candidate — we had that. (I know Doug Wilder, and he's as skillful as anybody you're going to find.) Number two, you have to have a position that commands broad support — well, we had that. And three, you had to dominate the language of the debate. And why that's very critical, particularly in a southern state, is...whenever you argue an issue, you have to do it consistent with the culture of the state.... It's the question of who is going to dominate the symbols and the language of the debate. Normally anti-abortion people in the southern states have dominated the language and the symbolism of the debate immediately, putting the pro-choice people on the defensive. And it is an absolute fact, you can take it to the bank with you, that you don't win points on the defensive.... You only win points on the offensive. So we had to dominate the language in the debate to force Coleman to argue it in our language/cultural terms. By doing that, we can put him on the defensive. But you have to do it right from the beginning. That was why it was important for us not to use the words "pro-choice" in our sales from the beginning.... This is why ERA went down — not so much because people didn't believe in it, but because tactically, they let the other side put them into a situation where they were on the defensive. So we didn't use those terms; we focused on Coleman's opposition to abortion even in the case of rape and incest."*

In both states, the language used by the pro-choice candidates usually avoided seemingly feminist rhetoric. "I trust the women of Virginia" or "I trust the women of New Jersey" were commonly heard themes used to justify the pro-choice candidates' position. Particularly in Virginia, as one pro-life legislative candidate observed, the pro-choice position became intertwined with that state's political tradition.

> *... a kind of Jeffersonian, libertarian, almost conservative issue, I thought was really great. When they did that I thought it was damn persuasive.... It was a good argument to keep the government out of your lives. When you look over to a Republican who says, "I'm going to impose more government," but here's the Democrat saying, "I'm going to impose less".... It was a darn good handling of the issue. I don't think they could have handled it better.*

Given Virginia's slightly more conservative perspective on abortion policy, it is not surprising that the Wilder campaign attempted to wrap its message in the

Virginia flag and Virginia heritage to broaden his appeals to the voters. His pro-choice message was integrated into campaign themes such as "the new mainstream" and "Let's take Virginia forward." And indeed it appears that it was quite successful. A Wilder campaigner and a pro-choice activist made the following observations.

> *I think Doug [Wilder] basically figured out how to talk about this issue. And it wasn't a matter of whether or not you were in favor of abortion.... The whole issue is whether or not politicians should be making the decision or whether it should be an individual decision made by the woman and her doctor or her minister.... You can make the debate individual rights and liberties in the best tradition of the Founding Fathers, going back to Thomas Jefferson.* (Wilder campaign activist)

> *The way that Wilder was able to frame the issue, he wrapped himself in the American flag. His whole Jeffersonian ad point of view that he was able to sort of capture the tide at the time. And the whole public image of Virginia as a state that values privacy so highly, that we might be actually seen as more mainstream. And that's why the other side felt that they had to start modifying their extremist positions. Before they used to embrace this idea that it was only under extreme conditions where a woman's life was at stake, that maybe we should allow abortion.... Now they found that they can't embrace that kind of extremist position.* (Pro-choice activist)

The Florio campaign was also careful in discussing the issue, talking about it as "choice." As one Florio campaign activist explained:

> *I would call it the issue of choice... The way the issue is getting framed nationally it's not about whether or not you are pro-abortion or anti-abortion. Because Governor Florio is not in favor of people having abortions. He would prefer they don't, certainly not as a form of birth control.... The issue is what's the government's role in regulating a woman's right to whether or not she has an abortion. And so it's an issue of government involvement in a personal decision. And that's why it's much better framed as a right-to-choose.... I don't accept that it is a women's rights issue. It's an issue having to do with the whole attitude towards personal privacy, of which the decision on choice is an aspect.*

The Florio campaign neither emphasized the issue as much as the Wilder campaign, nor sought to deal with the issue as part of a more general theme in the

campaign. To be sure, the emphasis was on choice, but it was not used as often and it seemed that the campaign wanted to use it only enough to acknowledge a pro-choice position for the benefit of those who would base their decisions on this issue. One knowledgeable Republican observer compared the way that Florio and Wilder used the issue.

> *Florio didn't advance that [libertarian] argument [like Wilder did]. What he did is he simply allowed the Courter campaign to flounder on the issue.*

While Wilder and Florio were praised by pro-choicers for their framing of the issue, both Coleman and Courter were heavily criticized by pro-life activists for failing to attempt to reframe the issue, to shift the focus of the question from the role of government, or "who decides," to the rights of the unborn. Pro-life activists in both states made the following observations.

> *Every time somebody has a chance in New Jersey, they'll start talking about our New Jersey Constitution as giving a right to abortion in addition to the federal Constitution.... And Courter, as a matter of fact, talked about the New Jersey Constitution supporting women's right to abortion or guaranteeing a woman's right to abortion. Absolutely untrue....* Right-to-Choose v. Byrne*...becomes Courter's* raison d'etre *for finding a right to abortion in the New Jersey Constitution as enunciated by him and his '89 campaign.... And the issue is framed in terms of constitutional embedded, long-standing nondestructible constitutional rights.... Framing the thing in terms of these basic rights of women in the constitution etcetera. These inalienable liberal rights and so on. And the baby's right to life is sort of, well, not discussed, or it's compared with these giant constitutional rights. It's almost insignificant.* (New Jersey pro-life activist)

> *He [Coleman] was apologetic for his position. And I think that's where he got into trouble from the very beginning. We had asked them to respond very quickly to the Wilder ads and that was at that meeting where they said well, it's going to go away, don't pay any attention to it. We didn't feel like it would, and it didn't. What is the perception of the public...when you have someone who makes an accusation in a political race, and you don't respond to it? The perception becomes, there must be some substance to it. And I think that's what happened in this case.* (Virginia pro-life activist)

The Coleman campaign was divided over how to deal with this emphasis on individual rights. Some wished to reframe the issue, while others preferred to concentrate on other issues, ignoring this issue which Coleman labelled in one debate as the only issue Wilder had. Two Coleman activists had different perspectives:

> *Let's pre-empt Wilder. Let's come out and do a pre-empt strike and nail him to the wall as an extremist before he nails us. I said that the only thing they've got is Big Brother, interfering with personal decisions. That's what they're going to hit us with and we don't have a real good answer. As Republicans who don't like having interference in our lives, we'll never pull out of it. It would be very difficult to pull out of it if we don't pre-empt.... If we'd been in control of the debate, then anything he does is defensive. And I mean, nobody would move on that one iota, because they operate on fear of the abortion issue.... I obviously never succeeded in having him understand you can be wonderful on every other issue, but this one is going to kill you if you don't know how to defuse [it].*

> *We would have been spending money, a lot of money... talking about an issue [abortion] which we were continually losing on. There were no majorities in support of us on our position.... And if we attacked him on one thing then he always had to come back up saying yes but, I'm leaving this up to the women to choose.*

Those who desired to avoid the issue won for a time, but not for long.

Courter, like Coleman, made no early attempt to reframe the issue. Courter's strategy of changing his position presented the campaign with different problems. Changing his position on the issue (away from his long-time pro-life position toward a more pro-choice position) meant reframing the issue in the manner the pro-life activists suggested would be pointless. His change of position was defended by Republicans such as these two.

> *When you're looking at polling information (which is nothing more than the views of people) that says that 80% of the people in New Jersey believe that abortion should be legal, not only is it unwise politically to take an opposite viewpoint, but it makes a very strong case against a representative form of government if you're going to say, well, I know four out of five of you oppose this, but I'm going to do it anyway.*

*There was a lot of discussion about the whole abortion issue and how Jim Courter wanted to deal with it. We had a number of talks. I did [talk] with him and also with his campaign people. And they also talked to a number of other people, women, influential women in our party. Or if not influential, certainly women who were very concerned about the issue and felt very strongly about it. And Jim crafted what he thought was the right position for him. So it was done with a lot of deliberation.*

Whether a consistently pro-life Courter could have successfully reframed the issue early on (as pro-life activists insist he should have done) will never be known, just as we will never know how such an effort would have fared in Virginia. What is clear is that once the Courter campaign came to the realization that the issue would not fade away, their attempts to recast the issue as a debate over parental consent failed and were hardly noticed.

*I remember this one quote that I saw over and over again where Courter said the decision is not going to be relevant to this race because the Governor's out of the loop of the decision-making process. Coleman said that too. However, that didn't wash with the press at all. They continued to ask all the what-if questions.... The initial position of it being irrelevant to the Governor, that was apparent after a couple of weeks that that was not going to sell.... So then there was more of a move into attempt to see some type of middle ground on the issue as far as parental notification is concerned.... I think that all got lost in the shuffle. The way the media attempted to portray it initially as a black and white issue, he's pro-life, he's pro-choice.... It certainly would have relieved more of the hemorrhaging, had we successfully been able to make it* not *a referendum on pro-life/pro-choice, but a referendum on parental notification or not parental notification. That was what we were trying to do, and that failed.* (Courter campaign activist)

Efforts to impugn Florio's integrity for having changed his position were to no avail either.

*We tried to get the press corps to focus at least some attention to the fact that Congressman Florio had changed his position on abortion. Granted, he did it some time before Congressman Courter and...he didn't do it in the heat of a political campaign, but indeed he had once been very much pro-life. He was a member of the Pro-Life Speakers Bureau and just eighteen months earlier had sent out a letter*

> *which indicated that he was pro-life. And so we did try to get the media to pay some attention to that. And they did a little bit. I mean, NJN [New Jersey Network] ran a pretty blistering story on Florio's change and his letter, but [the major media] didn't pick it up that much. He was, his change was credible to them and Congressman Courter's change was not credible to them.* (Courter campaign activist)

Another Republican concurred in this observation adding:

> *Florio had been a staunchly pro-life Congressman up until I believe 1982. So we essentially let the media know and gave them material and voting records and promoted it with the press. Florio, who is this guy Florio, what is he, he is saying this, but look at here is his record. He got some initial bad press on it, but it seems to me that both the activist groups and the press, were willing to give him more of...the benefit of the doubt because after 1983 he was consistently pro-choice.*

One New Jersey Republican activist summed up the problem the Courter campaign faced and the weakness in its handling of the issue as follows:

> *I think we could have enunciated it maybe more clearly and perhaps not let other people enunciate it for us.... To some degree we let the media and others sort of frame the issue rather than us doing that ourselves.*

Given that the Florio campaign gave relatively little attention to the abortion issue in its commercials, the pro-choice activists' resurgence following *Webster* and their attempts to define the candidates were undoubtedly important in shaping voters' perceptions of the candidates' positions.

A major question raised in the wake of *Webster* was whether the pro-choice groups could organize and muster resources to equal the political power presumably wielded by right-to-life groups. As the next section explains, they did meet this challenge.

## ISSUE ACTIVISTS' IMPACT ON CAMPAIGN MESSAGES

Candidates are not the only ones sending messages to voters. Issue activists played critical roles in some of the campaigns. The legal constraints on pro-life and pro-choice groups were different in the two states. Public financing laws in New Jersey encourage gubernatorial candidates to distance their campaigns from interest groups and discourage coordinated efforts. Interest group expenditures for coordinated efforts count against candidate spending limits. Virginia laws posed few impediments to activist-candidate cooperation, as one pro-choice activist explained:

> *Virginia has got fairly unrestrictive election laws. So our hands were a lot freer.... [In] Virginia you could run a coordinated independent expenditure campaign meaning you can have strategy discussions with the campaign. You can actually put staff into their campaign staff structure. Most states...don't have that luxury. If we decide to do an independent expenditure campaign we can have no contact with the campaign.... With Florio in New Jersey, we had to work completely separate from his organization.*

### Pro-Life Activity

The pro-life groups, disaffected with Courter, were not involved in the gubernatorial campaign in New Jersey. When the New Jersey Pro-Life PAC announced its endorsements, Courter's name was not on the list. They withheld their endorsement from Courter, initially citing his failure to return his questionnaire. It was clear they were displeased with his retreat from the pro-life position he had long held and their displeasure grew stronger as the election drew nearer. One Courter activist observed:

> *[The pro-life groups were not involved in the general election campaign] in any way that anybody could see. Not post-primary. There was a lot of organized pro-life activity during the primary on behalf of either Courter, Cardinale or Hardwick, but not after the primary.... On election day, the organized, and I emphasize the organized, pro-life forces in the state opposed Jim Courter. Does that mean they went out and voted for Jim Florio? No. They stayed home or they didn't vote because they felt that they had been betrayed. They thought that Jim Courter was their candidate...despite the fact that Jim Courter said from July on that he would not impose his personal convictions, which were pro-life, on the people of the state of New Jersey. Unfortunately, the organized pro-life forces didn't come to that realization until I believe it was early October, when there was*

*an article in the Star Ledger which said, inaccurately, that Courter again switches stands on abortion which didn't happen.*

The pro-life activists in Virginia were far more active in gubernatorial campaign activities than was true of New Jersey pro-lifers. Their presence was more visible than was typically the case in New Jersey and they undoubtedly played some role in sending messages to voters. It is not at all clear these were the messages the Coleman campaign would have preferred. In an unusual move, the Virginia Society for Human Life (VSHL), the National Right-to-Life affiliate in Virginia, publicly endorsed Coleman:

> *We did publicly endorse Marshall Coleman. But normally we turn that information over to the candidate. We publish endorsements in our newsletter to our membership so that they know who the solid pro-life people are. But it's generally left up to the candidates to use the endorsement as they see fit.* (Virginia pro-life activist)

Their more typical style had been:

> *You go about your business quietly, you activate, you identify your support. You keep in touch with and you motivate that support at the time you need it for legislation, elections, whatever. But you do your work quietly, you do it in the background, you don't really care whether you have the media or not. We've been forced out of that mold to some extent, I believe, to go public with a lot of things.* (Virginia pro-life activist)

They undertook a variety of activities, some of which apparently diverged from their traditional tactics and others which they more traditionally used:

> *We did a lot of media, a lot of TV, a lot of distribution of literature, a lot of phone calling, a lot of get out the vote, radio ads, newspaper ads, for Marshall Coleman really a blitz in the last ten days.... I think we changed some of those polls now.* (Virginia pro-life activist)

Churches were also a critical component in their strategies to reach voters.

> *Many of the people, in fact, most of the people that are pro-lifers are involved in churches. The church of course cannot endorse candidates. So we have a situation where we don't do that. We do mostly our education through them. We do put a user comparison*

> *piece in churches that will compare candidates, and we did this for the past election in the churches that would take it. Some wouldn't.... It was just for the gubernatorial.* (Virginia pro-life activist)

For all their work, the Coleman campaign seemed rather uncomfortable with the organized pro-life forces. The Virginia Society for Human Life's activities seemed more distant from Coleman's campaign than was true of the pro-choicers working for his opponent. As one pro-life activist explained:

> *We had very little contact with the Coleman campaign. They did not ask for our endorsement and we didn't ask them if they wanted it, we gave it to them.... This campaign frankly I believe would have asked us to be quiet, to say nothing. In fact they told us so.... They wanted the support. They would have loved for us to pour money in and let them use it as they saw fit. But it would not have motivated the pro-life voter. And that's a big problem. We were running into pro-life voters in big segments, close to the election saying, where is Marshall Coleman on the issue?*

But the greatest frustration of the VSHL was with the media. This frustration seemed to be due to a general perception of media bias and a perception of media censorship:

> *It's just a fact of life...the media on this subject is biased. I mean, you know, the best P.R. a pro-choice candidate has is the media.* (Coleman campaign activist)

> *In the gubernatorial race we lost that race because of a certain amount of censorship of the media.... One thing that is really discouraging about this whole thing is that CBS polling, for instance, asked what they based their decision on how they voted, what caused them to vote the way they did, what influenced them the most. And 40 percent of those people said TV. And you lose an election by 6,000 votes...[and] lose by 20,000 votes in an area that refused to let us have our TV ads,...that's tragic.* (Virginia pro-life activist)

The major controversy focused on TV ads:

> *We [VSHL] attempted to produce thirty second ads to support Marshall Coleman.... We ran into severe opposition from the TV stations, primarily in the Washington, D.C. area and northern Virginia area. The eight major TV outlets up there refused to carry*

> *our ads while they were carrying their [NARAL] ads.... We had two stations here in Richmond that refused to carry them. And one station did carry. Then the one of the two that initially refused accepted the ads when we removed the name of Douglas Wilder from the ads. In other words, we could only focus on Marshall Coleman, we couldn't talk about Douglas Wilder. The whole intent of the ads was to show the extreme radical position of Doug Wilder who was calling Marshall Coleman a radical on this thing. And we just couldn't get that message out...particularly the northern Virginia situation.... We just feel like it was just censorship by the TV media that caused this to take place. There is no opposition and Mr. Wilder was allowed to get his message out totally while we were actually stopped from doing that.* (Virginia pro-life activist)

One Coleman activist explained the content of the controversial ads:

> *They prepared four ads that, and they had a fair amount of money, to go to the major stations. Mainly they were going to the same stations that were playing NARAL's ads. And NARAL's ads were most vicious against Marshall. I think they destroyed him. Politics of fear is what they were pulling for. But you would think that with equal, fair doctrine that you could get the others [to air them]. They couldn't. They just refused to take them.... The first one was on spousal rights and it started off showing a father, a Virginian, he was from Virginia, whatever. He was just talking to the camera talking about that my wife aborted two of my children and I couldn't stop her and I wasn't even told until after it was done. And then, I forget exactly the graphics, it goes to a picture of Doug Wilder saying under the Wilder administration that he thinks fathers should have no rights in the abortion decision. It fades off with a father holding a 3-month old baby just kind of bouncing it and again it says, "Doug Wilder says No" and the baby just disappears out of the picture.... Then another one was frolicking babies on a blanket and the verbiage there, it goes from sex selection to, I forget the different things it came up with. It just says, "Wilder says no. Wilder says no. Wilder says no." So you get that connection. The third one...had good footage of Marshall with children. And...using words like "moderate and reasonable restrictions...the same ones you [support]"...and you got the idea Wilder didn't.... Then at the end it just says, "Now really, is it you and I that are out of the mainstream, assuming that you and I agree with this?"*

The Coleman campaign and the pro-life groups differed in their explanations for exactly why the ads were never shown. Some said it was censorship by the media

and others implied it was a lack of money. Another explanation suggested that in keeping with the desire to distance itself from the issue, the Coleman campaign chose not to take advantage of the ads:

> *Then, National Right-to-Life came to the [Coleman] campaign and just said, "Look, we're being censored. Would you take these and put your disclaimer on them?" And they can't not run them. They can't refuse. We will donate, transfer funds to put them on. And they [the Coleman campaign] didn't do it.... The campaign wouldn't...at the last minute they got nervous about doing it.* (Coleman campaign activist)

Activists and legislative candidates differed over whether these ads would have helped or harmed the Coleman effort.

## Pro-Choice Activity

Pro-life groups were involved in the campaign in Virginia, but their impact in both states was overshadowed by a resurgent pro-choice movement. One Coleman activist saw their pro-choice opponents as quite effective:

> *[Pro-choice groups]...did a tremendously good job, I think in Virginia.... Where I think they were extremely effective was in the organization work and phone bank work that they did in northern Virginia and in the media that they put on up there. They were shooting there right at the target group that would react to what they were trying to do. And the phone banks...[were]...just identifying people that were on their side of the issue. They were attacking us directly in telephone calls to individual voters in northern Virginia, where they were saying Marshall Coleman wants to turn things back to the way it was 20 years ago. He wants to punish the woman for having an abortion. He wants to [do] all these things. A lot of which weren't true.... They were very blatant. So they were effective in what they were doing, I think.*

One NARAL activist described their Virginia strategy for reaching pro-choice voters:

> *In Virginia, the Governor's race was primarily a media and voter contact program. And that was a paid voter phone bank with follow-up, get-out-the-vote mail and phone calls.... The first call was a voter identification phone call.... In the case of the Wilder [race]...we would call Republican and independent women who were basically 24 to 44 [and] ask them their position on choice. If they said they were*

> *anti-choice, we said thank you very much and hung up the phone. If they were pro-choice, we then went into a discussion of the two candidates' positions and try and get a sense from them whether or not they would be willing to cross over and support the pro-choice candidate. Those people then we did a follow-up piece of mail to, again to remind them of the two candidates' positions. And then we did a get-out-the-vote call on the days right before the election.... We do on-the-ground organizing for candidates. But we've never done anything in the scale that we did in the Wilder race and in the Florio race in New Jersey in '89.*

Another pro-choice activist added:

> *We were just trying to isolate those people who were definitely with us. We weren't trying to make any converts.*

A central NARAL objective was to appeal to voters who would be sensitive to the issue and who might be missed by other pro-choice groups:

> *Where we thought that we could make the difference is by concentrating on...pro-choice Republican and independents who maybe for the first time in their life were going to vote Democrat. And that was our focus...[in] the Wilder race specifically.... There [are]...two major differences in [the National Organization for Women's and NARAL's]...approaches. First of all...[NARAL is] much more aggressive in the paid media department than NOW is. NOW['s]...strong suit...traditionally has been in grass roots organizing. So...they probably percentage wise put more resources into that or more emphasis on that than we [NARAL] do.... The second difference between...[NARAL] and NOW was the kinds of messages that we were using. NOW's messages...[are] more...feminist oriented, more women's community oriented. And with the whole "who decides" message, what we were trying to do is reach for mainstream voters who might sort of feel they're pro-choice but have never felt compelled to vote for a candidate based on that or whatever. So I think we take more of a mainstream kind of approach in our media and in organizing efforts.* (NARAL activist)

A NOW activist agreed there were differences in the approaches of pro-choice groups but by working in their own ways they were able to accomplish their goals:

*[NOW's purpose for the election was] grass roots organizing, visibility of the issue. We had several rallies and freedom caravan stops.... NARAL is structured differently, so they are able to...come in at the top and spend a lot of money for the high profile advertising and for the professionally run phone banks.... Planned Parenthood did a lot of education.... They did the rulers campaign which was successful.... These...rulers...said, "Make Choice the Rule. Keep abortion safe and legal in Virginia." And the other side said, "I'm pro-choice and I vote." And it has a signature and address space. And thousands and thousands of those were delivered to Coleman and Wilder.*

This observation by a Virginia NOW activist points to the critical role that small tasks may play in an election.

*[One member] took the list of people that had signed in at the April 9th march and worked on cleaning that list and making it accessible for us. And it was constant decision making.... So we had a list we thought was reasonably clean of 10,600 people.... Our experience with telephones shows that for every household we reach we have 1.7 voters. If you really estimate low and say only 50 percent of that list was good,...you have 5,000. You have 5,000 times 1.7 voters and that's the victory margin.*

Despite the greater constraints posed by New Jersey law, pro-choice activists were involved in the New Jersey gubernatorial race as well. One NARAL activist explained their New Jersey strategy in the gubernatorial race:

*We organized a campaign plan that included basically four activities. The first activity was launching the campaign.... We had two events, one in the northern part of the state, one in the Central part of the state...to let people know that we were going to be doing a campaign to get people involved and to get them signed up. The second activity...was...debate house parties.... The goal of those parties was really to decentralize and localize the activity. The third activity which was an ongoing activity was that we had...phone banks...to let people know what was going on in the gubernatorial race, to let people know that they had a choice.... We did a paid telemarketing campaign where we called into Republican-leaning districts to identify pro-choice voters who would be willing to cross party lines in the gubernatorial [race].... A final activity was neighborhood walks, where we had a large number of volunteers. We got people walking on a Saturday to go to places in their neighborhood and pass out literature and talk to their neighbors and friends about the difference*

*between Courter and Florio. Also, in addition to phoning, there was a lot of ongoing activity that we did. We did tabling. There were people who tabled in communities. There people who tabled at PATH Stations. There were people who tabled in the college campuses.*

The important role that activities such as these potentially played in the campaign is clear from the relatively low profile the Florio campaign gave the issue. The Florio campaign had to distance itself from their activities in light of the public funding requirements, but almost certainly benefitted from their independent efforts.

*We were very, very careful to maintain maximum distance between our campaign and what the pro-choice movement was doing. So that our only exposure to kind of what they were doing was what we would hear on the radio or see on the news coverage. I think that the efforts they made to communicate with the electorate in terms of mass media with radio and TV were probably very helpful. Because there are people who don't...take the time to study this issue with any depth, but if they're in their car on their way to work and they hear a 30-second spot that says "Do you realize that Governor Florio wants to protect your right to choice and that Congressman Courter wants to take away that right?" then that thirty seconds for a lot of people can make the difference.... So I think that was probably very helpful.... But again, it was clearly up to the different organizations that were working on both sides to decide their own agenda and we did not pass judgement on any of that.* (Florio campaign activist)

As in Virginia, NOW played a role in raising public awareness of the issue in the gubernatorial race. Hoping to benefit from NOW's role, Courter tried to reframe the debate by turning NOW's support of Florio into a political liability:

*After floundering for a while on abortion what we tried to do (and it was initially successful), was to associate [Florio] with NARAL and NOW and [NOW national president] Molly Yard as a liberal. I remember she came through in...the NOW caravan...and we knew she was going to come into the state. We geared up to link Florio with the more unpopular positions of NOW.... What we did successfully, [but] we did not sustain it,...was when Molly Yard was in the state, come out and state,..."We support parental notification. Florio and Molly Yard don't." So we were trying to play the association game.* (Courter campaign activist)

This tactic was also attempted in Virginia, as one Coleman activist explained:

> *They [the Wilder campaign] were very smart about it. Their strategy was not to be involved with somebody like Molly Yard who was an obvious turnoff to the average voter in Virginia. And once she had done I think the minimum that she needed to do in order to carry out her own organization aims and goals she stayed out of Virginia. And Wilder people obviously were pushing her to stay out of Virginia.*

The "association game" was apparently not effective in either state. New Jersey's campaign finance laws which prevented coordinated efforts with groups and Wilder's early disagreements with pro-choicers over parental consent may have somewhat insulated Florio and Wilder from the negative effects of the association game. Furthermore, our polling results (presented in Chapter 1) showed that voters had relatively positive feelings about pro-choice groups, but were less favorably predisposed toward pro-life groups. These positive views about pro-choice groups generally may have compromised the effectiveness of the association game. At the same time, the pro-choice groups undoubtedly played some role in informing voters about the candidates' stands. What was unclear was whether voters could be moved by these messages from candidates and the activists who tried to help them.

## THE IMPACT OF THE ABORTION ISSUE ON VOTING PREFERENCES IN THE GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS

Voters may bring particular issue concerns to elections and seek out information relevant to those concerns. Alternatively, voters may be swayed by the messages of campaigns as they decide which issues or concerns should be of particular importance and which candidates will get their votes on election day. The *Webster* decision undoubtedly encouraged some voters to seek out information and others to be more responsive to abortion policy messages from candidates. *Webster* affected voters indirectly by affecting what the candidates would choose to discuss and the concerns they would be forced to discuss by the media, activists, and voters. It also affected the messages by galvanizing the pro-choice movement so that they would be as powerful or more so than the pro-life groups who had previously dominated the debate.

As noted earlier, in both states other issues such as auto insurance (in New Jersey), the environment, transportation, and crime — issues touching the voters' daily lives more often than the abortion issue — were competing with the abortion issue for the voters' attention. In Virginia, some feared that racial prejudice — a ubiquitous but unspoken issue — would dominate. The question was whether the abortion issue could affect the election outcomes in view of the powerful attraction of the other issues.

For the abortion issue to have a direct impact on voting decisions in the gubernatorial races, we would expect that three conditions should be met:

- Voters should consider the abortion issue important in this specific gubernatorial election.
- Voters should perceive a difference between the candidates' positions on the issue.
- Voters should choose the candidate closer to their own position on the issue.

## IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE TO THE VOTERS IN THE ELECTION

To see whether voters saw this issue as important in the gubernatorial races, we asked:

> *Lots of issues have been talked about during this campaign. We are interested in knowing which issues are most important to you. First, are there any issues in the election for governor that are particularly important to you? (IF YES): What are the most important issues to you in the campaign for governor of New Jersey/Virginia?*[3]

Figure 2-1 shows that about one out of five New Jersey voters and two out of five Virginia voters mentioned the abortion issue as particularly important to them in the gubernatorial race.[4] This was the issue most frequently mentioned in Virginia; it ranked third in New Jersey behind auto insurance (35% mentioned) and the environment (28% mentioned) and virtually tied for third place with taxes (18%). It

[3]Up to five responses were accepted.

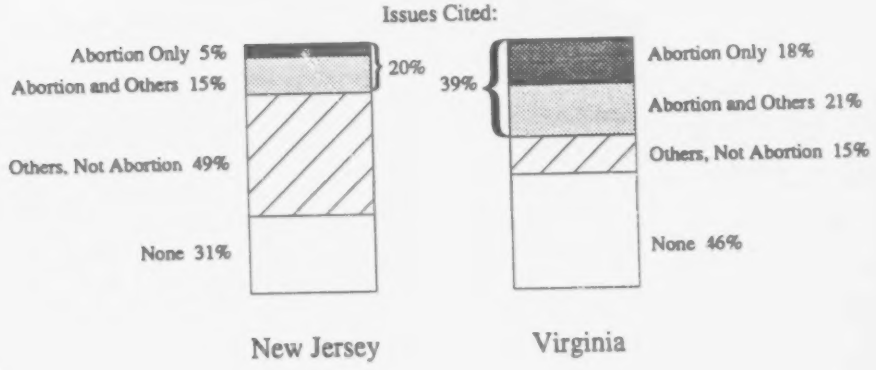
[4]Virginia voters seemed uncomfortable mentioning the race issue, but some think that it was one of the most important issues for voters in the first state to elect a Black governor. For more information see Sabato, *op. cit.*

was mentioned by many as an important issue to them in the gubernatorial campaigns, despite the fact that other issues appeared to have the potential to be more important election issues (see Chapter 1, Figure 1-12). That it was the most frequently mentioned issue in Virginia points to the important role that campaigns play in influencing whether voters see issues as relevant to particular elections.

Indeed, Virginians were more likely to link their general concern about the issue to the gubernatorial campaign. Fifty-seven percent of Virginians compared with only 36% of New Jerseyans who rated the abortion issue as generally very important (as discussed in Chapter 1) also mentioned it as important in the gubernatorial campaign. Although voters in the two states were similarly likely to find the abortion issue very important in general and although other issues appeared to have the potential to move larger segments of voters, Virginians were twice as likely as New Jerseyans to mention the issue as important in the election. This difference suggests the influential role the Virginia campaign played in making voters who were concerned about the issue more likely to see its relevance to the gubernatorial election. It may also suggest that the lack of an issue in Virginia that could arouse as much concern as New Jersey's excessively high insurance rates or periodic shore pollution probably facilitated receptivity to messages aimed at increasing the importance of the issue to the voters.

Wilder campaign activists were quite aware of the link between defining an issue and holding voter interest:

Figure 2-1:
Percent Citing Abortion Issue
As Important in Gubernatorial Races

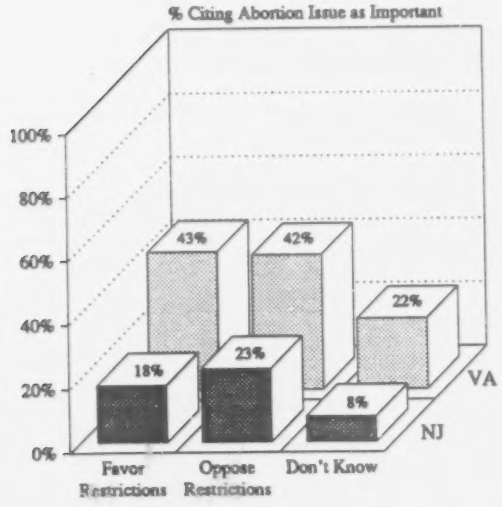


*The way you talk about issues in any campaign has a lot to do with whether they are salient and whether or not they move voters. The way...Doug Wilder talked about abortion in Virginia, was very libertarian — keep the government out of our personal lives; I trust the women of Virginia, not the politicians, to make these personal decisions. So that the way we talked about it, I think also resonated with voters in Virginia.*

In contrast, the Florio campaign had given less attention to this issue in its messages.

Given that the issue was successfully framed around the role of government, the importance voters attributed to this issue benefitted the pro-choice side in both states. While pro-choice and pro-life voters were equally likely to cite the abortion issue as important (see Figure 2-2a), the vast majority of those who mentioned the issue[5] opposed new government restrictions, simply because those who opposed new restrictions were a much larger group to begin with (Figure 2-2b).[6]

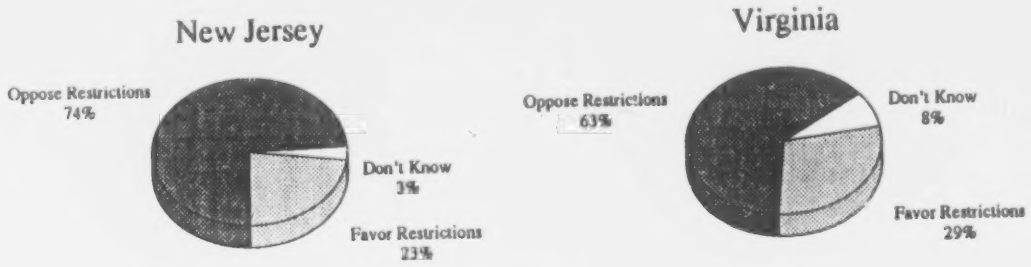
Figure 2-2a:
% Citing Abortion Issue as Important
In Gubernatorial Races
By Attitudes Toward New Restrictions




[5]Those who cited the abortion issue as important are referred to as "mentioners."

[6]We will never know whether this would have been the case had the issue been framed differently.

Figure 2-2b:
Attitudes Toward New Restrictions Among Voters
Citing Abortion Issue in Gubernatorial Races



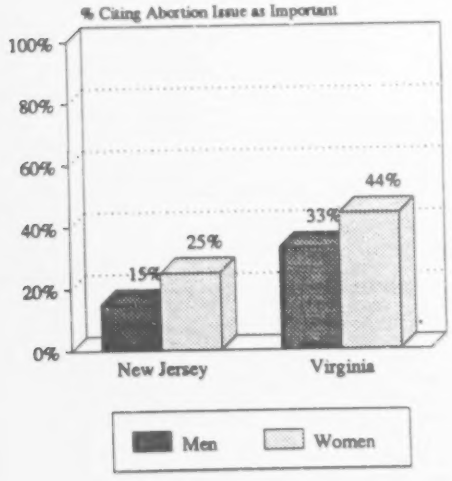
Some types of voters, however, were particularly concerned about the abortion issue in the gubernatorial campaigns. They included younger women, newcomers to the South (in Virginia), and to a lesser extent, more highly educated voters.

## Gender

Just as women were more likely than men to rate the abortion issue as very important *in general*, within each state women were also more likely than men to mention the abortion issue as a particular concern in the gubernatorial election (Figure 2-3). The sense that the candidates had of women's intensity of feelings on the issue in the gubernatorial race was particularly strong in northern Virginia:

> *Every person I've talked to, every candidate, said you can see determined young women going to the polls around 5:00 who probably wouldn't have voted in the statewide race if it were otherwise. It was a high turnout, much higher than expected. Democrats were predicting around 40%, we were predicting about 50%, ending up being about 60%.... [And] those other 10% weren't*

Figure 2-3:
% of Men and Women Citing Abortion Issue
As Important in Gubernatorial Races



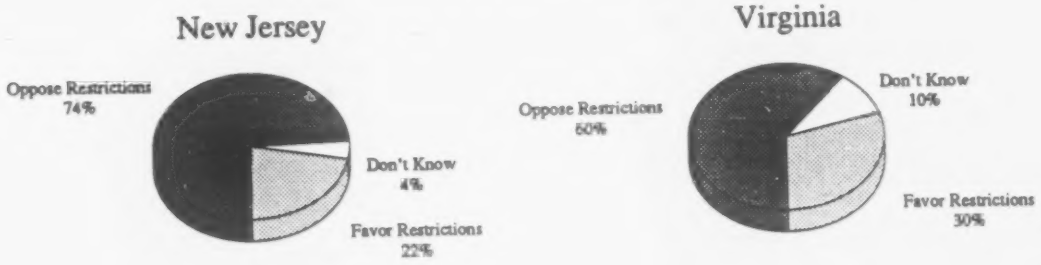
*voting for Marshall Coleman.* (Republican legislative candidate, northern Virginia)

*On election day between 6 and 7 p.m., the single women going to the polls made a wall of women. Woman, woman, woman, not woman and man. If they were getting off the buses, off the Metros from Washington, they were making sure they got here and voted.* (Republican legislative candidate, northern Virginia)

The general impression of some legislative candidates was that women who were mobilized were predominantly pro-choice, and our data support that impression. Pro-life women were no less likely than pro-choice women to be concerned with the issue, but there were more pro-choice women to begin with. The result was that the majority of women finding the issue important in the election opposed new government restrictions on abortion (Figure 2-4).

Abortion is often assumed to be predominantly a "women's issue." Nevertheless, it also concerns many men. A sizeable group of men cited the issue as important to them. Indeed, the fact that Virginia men were slightly more likely than New Jersey women to mention this issue as important suggests that the Wilder campaign's heavy and carefully designed emphasis on this issue affected *both* women and men (Figure 2-3).

Figure 2-4:
Attitudes Toward New Restrictions Among Women Citing Abortion Issue as Important in Gubernatorial Races

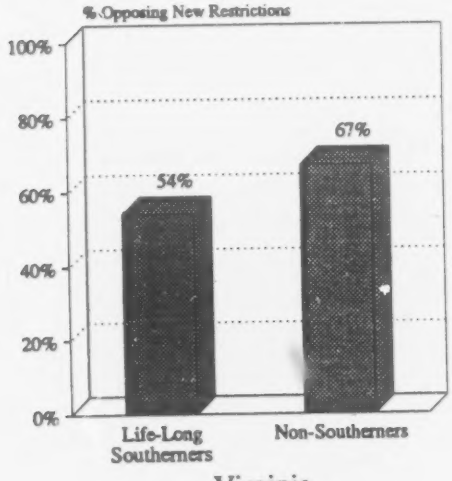


## Life-Long Southerners Versus Non-Southerners

Virginia is not a purely southern state, as many people think. In recent years, the Washington D.C. suburbs of northern Virginia have experienced an influx of people, primarily from outside the South. This migration of non-southerners to the seat of the old Confederacy had a great impact on the way that the abortion issue played, because non-southerners were more opposed to new restrictions and were more likely to see the issue as important in the gubernatorial race (Figures 2-5 and 2-6).

The difference arises among pro-choice voters; regional background had no impact among pro-life voters. Among voters who favored new restrictions on abortion, life-long southerners were just as likely as non-southerners to mention the abortion issue as important to them in the gubernatorial race. However, pro-choice non-southerners were much more likely than pro-choice native southerners to cite the issue as important to them in the gubernatorial race. This difference in regional background occurs among pro-choicers *outside* of northern Virginia; in northern Virginia, native southerners were similar to their neighbors without such strong ties to the South.

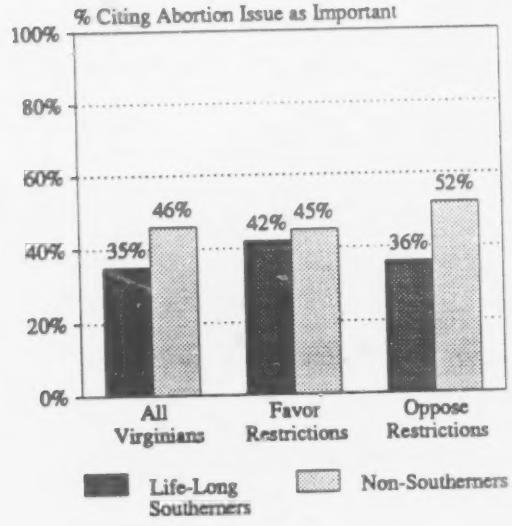
Figure 2-5:
% of Life-Long Southerners and Non-Southerners Opposing New Restrictions




Virginia

The fact that Wilder was black may have overshadowed the abortion issue among some native white pro-choice southerners and lessened the likelihood they would cite the issue as important. Had the pro-choice candidate been white, then these regional differences among pro-choice voters might not have been as great.[7]

Figure 2-6:
Percent Citing Abortion Issue as Important: Life-Long Southerners Versus Non-Southerners in Virginia




Alternatively, this regional difference among pro-choicers could be a function of cultural differences that make pro-choice native southerners more uncomfortable dealing with the issue. This explanation seems plausible in light of the trepidation expressed by some legislative candidates and the cautious approach of others from ostensibly more conservative rural areas populated predominantly by life-long Virginians. These legislative candidates frequently seemed skeptical of polling data showing a pro-choice majority in their districts, arguing, "It cuts both ways." One person who had worked for a pro-choice candidate in a rural area which was supposedly pro-choice remarked, "We were afraid our [pro-life] opponent was going to make it an issue."

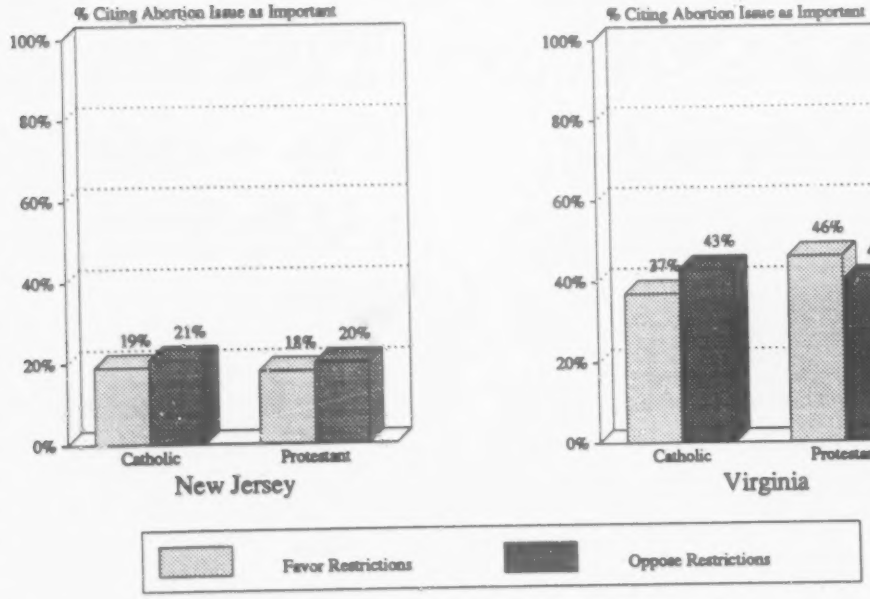
[7] As a general measure of racial attitudes, we asked whether respondents agreed or disagreed that the Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday holiday was a good idea. Eighty-two percent of pro-choice native Southerners who mentioned the abortion issue, compared to only 64% of their pro-choice native southern counterparts who did not mention the issue, favored the Martin Luther King holiday.

**Religion**

The conventional wisdom is that Catholic voters will not support a pro-choice candidate. While Catholic voters in both states were more likely than Protestant or Jewish voters to favor new restrictions, majorities of all three groups opposed new restrictions. In New Jersey, 33% of Catholic, 21% of Protestant, and 6% of Jewish voters favored new restrictions. In Virginia, 33% of Catholics and 26% of Protestants favored new restrictions. There were too few Jewish voters for analysis in the Virginia sample.

As Figure 2-7 shows, Catholics who favored new restrictions and those who opposed new restrictions were equally likely to mention the abortion issue as important in the gubernatorial race.[8] The same tended to be true of Protestants,

Figure 2-7:
% Citing Abortion Issue as Important in Gubernatorial Races
By Religion and Attitudes Toward New Restrictions

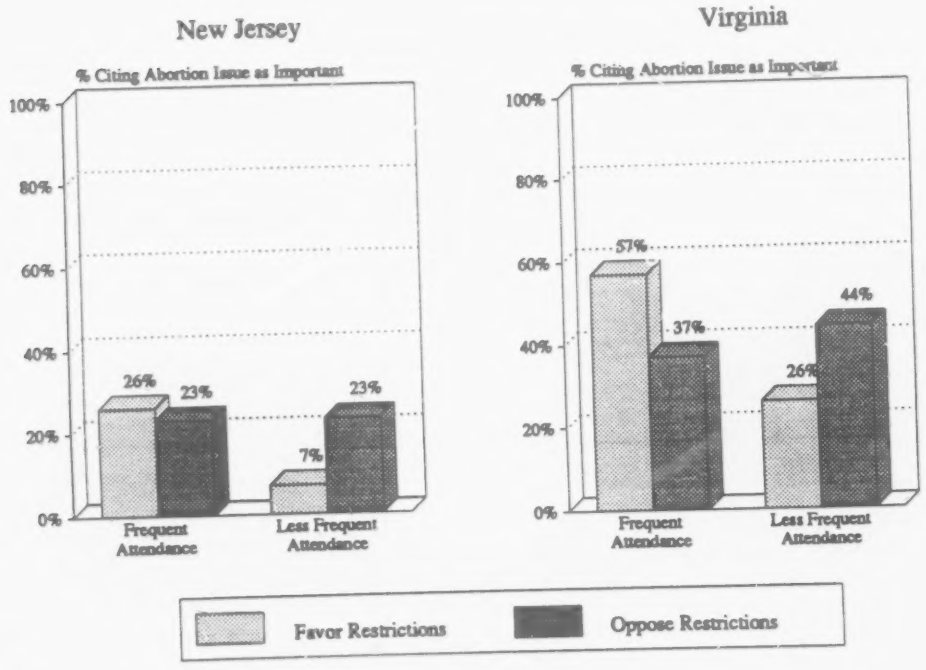



[8]Jewish voters are excluded from this figure because their numbers are too few in Virginia and only 3 of the 52 surveyed in New Jersey favored new restrictions. However, 41% of New Jersey Jewish voters opposing new restrictions mentioned the abortion issue in the gubernatorial race.

although in Virginia pro-life Protestants were slightly more likely than their pro-choice counterparts to mention the issue as important in the gubernatorial campaign.

The most substantial differences seem not to be from denominational affiliation, but rather from frequency of attendance at religious services (Figure 2-8). Among voters who favor new restrictions, those who attend religious services almost every week are far more likely than less frequent attenders to connect their views about restrictions to the gubernatorial contest as evidenced by their citing the abortion issue as important. Among those who oppose new restrictions, weekly attenders and less frequent attenders are about equally likely to connect their attitudes about the issue to the gubernatorial race in New Jersey. In Virginia, pro-choice weekly attenders are slightly less likely than their counterparts who are less frequent attenders to mention the abortion issue as an important issue in the gubernatorial race. Overall, frequent religious service attendance seems to provide pro-life voters

Figure 2-8:
% Citing Abortion Issue as Important in Gubernatorial Races
By Religious Service Attendance
and Attitudes Toward New Restrictions



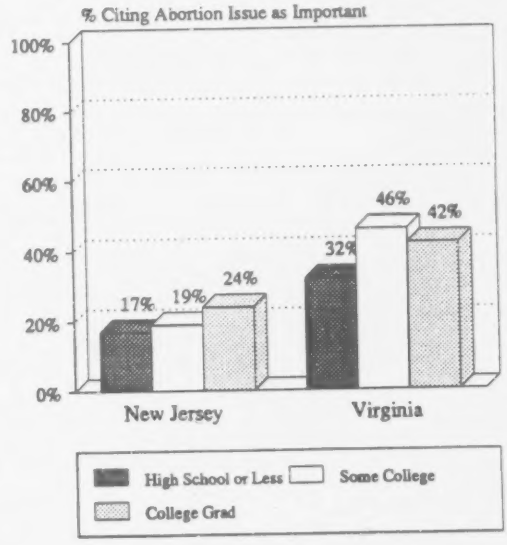
with the reinforcement of their beliefs and the messages or incentives to translate their views on this issue into political action; but it has relatively little effect on pro-choice voters' willingness to connect their concerns with the abortion issue to political action.

## Education

While education had little effect on the perceived general importance of the issue (see Chapter 1), better educated voters were somewhat more likely to connect their general interest in this issue with concern for it in the gubernatorial campaign (Figure 2-9).

These educational differences were greater in Virginia, where campaign messages seemed to be a catalyst for interest among all voters; they were insignificant in New Jersey. Educational differences occurred in Virginia because less well educated pro-choice voters did not connect their concern with the issue to the gubernatorial race. Pro-life voters, regardless of education level, were about equally likely to cite the abortion issue as important, perhaps because organizations that play a central role in the pro-life movement (e.g., churches and church-related groups) are likely to reach voters who might not otherwise be as politically involved. The difference between states may indicate that campaign efforts to increase the importance of the issue will have greater difficulty reaching less educated pro-choice voters unless pro-choicers more effectively reach out to them.

Figure 2-9:
% Citing Abortion Issue as Important
In Gubernatorial Races
By Educational Levels



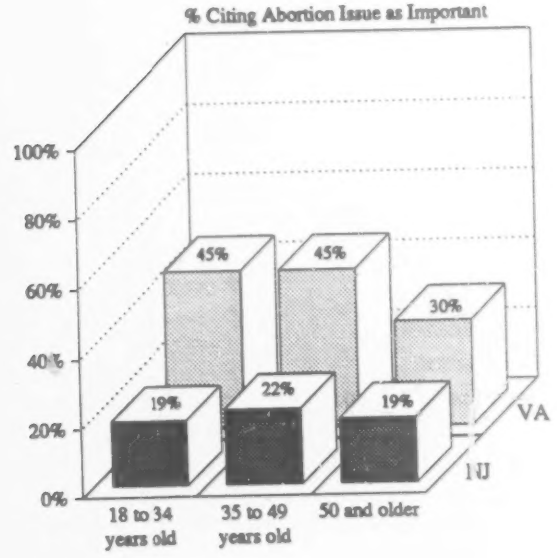

## Age

While the general importance attributed to the abortion issue did not vary with age (Chapter 1), in Virginia younger voters were more inclined than older voters to link their general interest in the issue to the gubernatorial race (Figure 2-

10). There were no such age differences in New Jersey. This difference between the two states suggests that when the issue is at the center of campaigns, younger voters may be more responsive to cues which encourage them to connect their concern with the issue to actions in the voting booth. It could also be due to the Wilder campaign targeting its messages to attract younger women voters who they felt were needed to win the election. A Wilder activist's comments support this explanation:

> *The issue was utilized most to win substantial votes with particularly younger voters and especially younger college-educated women.... The campaign always believed that to win it needed to get as much as 65 percent of younger women to support Governor Wilder. And that happened. And the abortion issue was a significant piece of that strategy.... It had the effect of dramatically motivating younger women to support Governor Wilder as a public position statement. It was a conservative statement which still made him acceptable across the board.*

Figure 2-10:
% Citing Abortion Issue as Important
In Gubernatorial Races
By Age

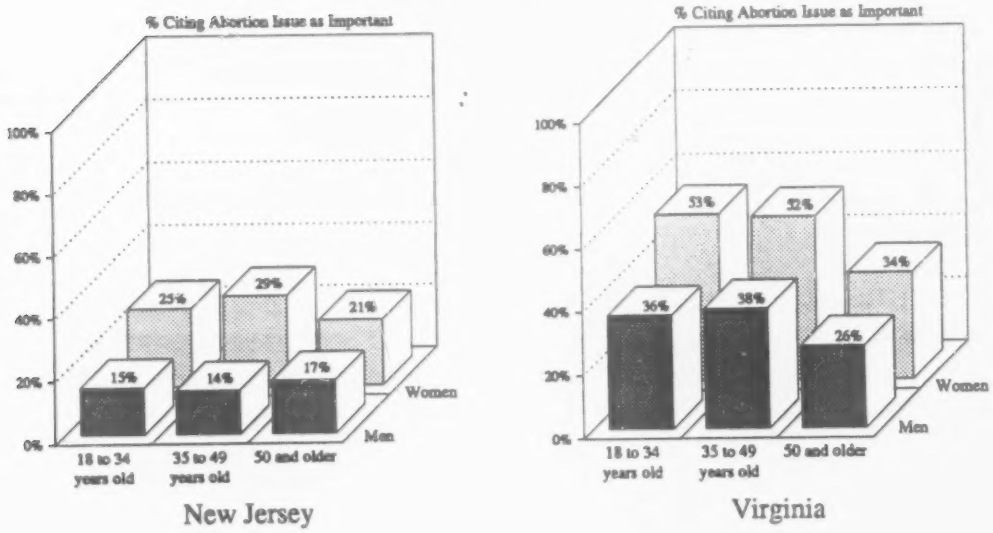


These age differences in Virginia were more dramatic among women than men (Figure 2-11). Indeed the likelihood of women over 50 citing this issue declines sharply (regardless of whether they were pro-choice or pro-life), reducing the gender gap in the fifty-plus group.[9]

The issue's ability to mobilize younger voters who may not be firmly committed to a party should greatly concern Republicans and may hold promise for Democrats who have been on the losing side of realignment trends in recent years. A Virginia Republican activist expressed this worry:

> *This is the big opportunity the Democrats have to get those 25 and under voters back. And that's the opportunity they face...but again, those voters also are very fickle and their turnout's low, but that's what concerns me.*

Figure 2-11:
% Citing Abortion Issue as Important
In Gubernatorial Races
By Age for Men and Women




[9]Some might attribute this to the race factor in the Virginia election. However, older pro-choice *and* pro-life voters were less likely than younger voters to cite the issue as important in the gubernatorial race. Therefore, racial attitudes probably had little to do with these age differences in Figure 2-11.

## Party Identification

Pro-life Democrats and pro-choice Republicans are less likely to mention the abortion issue as important to them in the gubernatorial race than are pro-choice Democrats and pro-life Republicans. The one exception is pro-choice Republican women in New Jersey, who were slightly more likely than other Republicans to mention this issue (Figure 2-12).[10] This may have been the result of Courter alienating pro-life supporters with his evolving position, while failing to give pro-choice groups a reason to demobilize and cease targeting him and defining him as pro-life. This pattern seems to make life in elections easier for Democrats and more difficult for Republicans in the two state[s] [a]long as the abortion issue is important.

Figure 2-13 shows that a major[ity] [o]f all Republican voters in both states oppose new government restrictions on abortion. However, pro-life Republicans in Virginia compensate for their lesser numbers by being more likely to see the issue as important in the gubernatorial election. Therefore, Virginia Republicans who cited the issue were almost evenly divided between those who favored new restrictions and those who opposed them. The difference between the views of all Republican voters and the views of Republican mentioners does not occur as much among the more moderate New Jersey Republicans. There, pro-choice Republicans continue to outnumber pro-life Republicans among mentioners. This is due to Republican pro-choice women caring more about the issue in the campaign and also possibly due to Courter alienating pro-life supporters whom he might have mobilized had he remained firm in his pro-life position.

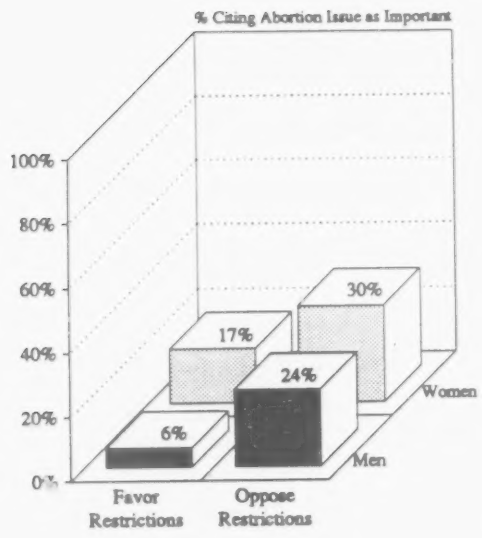
These findings suggest at least two possible implications for Virginia (and perhaps similar states) that have experienced an influx of activists from the New Right:

1) Because pro-life Republicans and pro-choice Republicans often need one another in order to win elections, the success of the "big tent"[11] strategy may be critical in keeping the party together and strong now that *Webster* has made abortion policy relevant in the electoral arena. However, it remains to be seen whether the "big tent" is big enough for both pro-choicers and pro-lifers to co-exist under it in order to win elections. When this issue is salient, pro-life or pro-choice Republicans dissatisfied

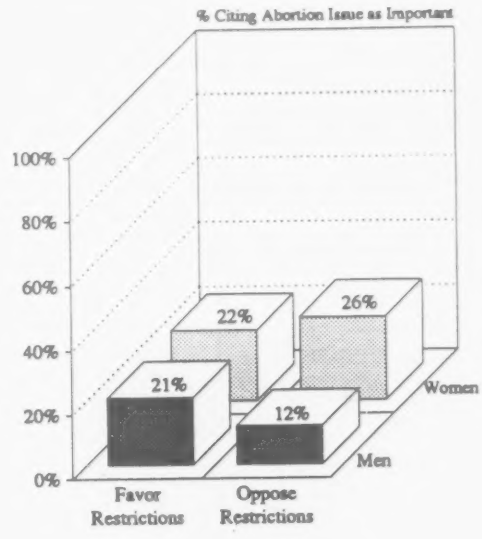
[10]Most of the Republican women citing the issue were not independent leaning Republicans, but rather Republicans who initially declared themselves as Republicans.

[11]The "big tent" approach advocated by National Republican Party chair Lee Atwater deems both pro-choice and pro-life views as acceptable within the GOP.

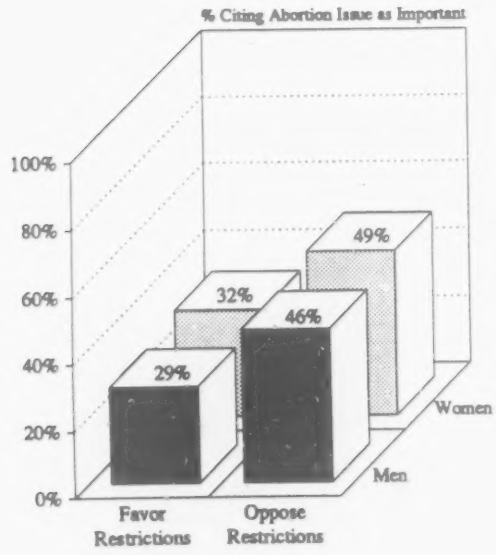
Figure 2-12:
% Citing Abortion Issue in Gubernatorial Races
By Attitudes Toward New Restrictions
By Party for Men and Women



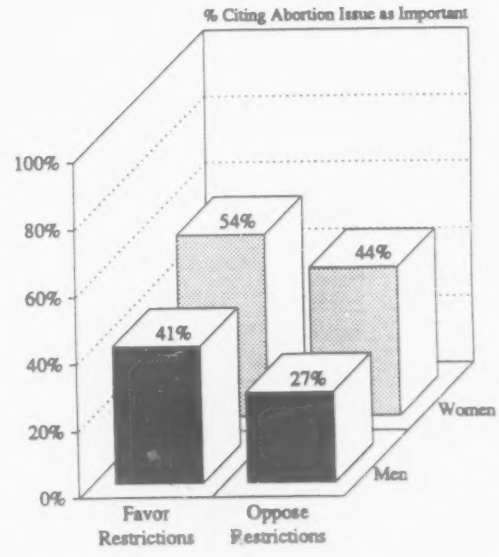

New Jersey Democrats




New Jersey Republicans



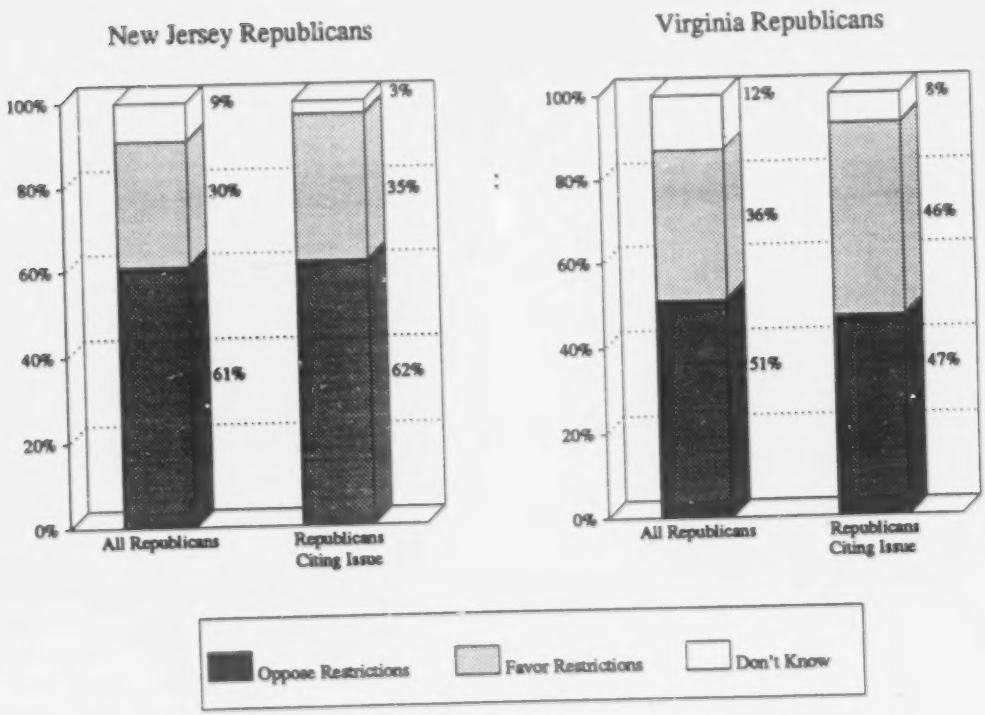

Virginia Democrats




Virginia Republicans

with the party nominee's position on this divisive and deeply emotional issue have the option of sitting on their hands or defecting to the Democrats. Unless pro-choice Republicans increase their presence among party activists, the threat of pro-life Republicans sitting out campaigns may seem the most serious. However, in those cases where the candidate favored by the pro-life Republicans is nominated, pro-choicers may not only sit on their hands, but concern with the issue may drive pro-choice Republicans across party lines to vote for a pro-choice Democrat. They may have this option more frequently than pro-life Republicans would have the option to vote for a pro-life Democrat. This could pose severe problems for winning general elections. The Supreme Court's *Webster* decision has presented a true challenge to

Figure 2-13:
Republicans' Attitudes Toward New Restrictions:
All Versus Those Citing Issue



the Republican coalition — more so than for the Democratic opposition as we will discuss below.

2) In recent months, pro-choice Republicans across the nation have formed groups in order to "re-capture" their party from the pro-life activists. However, the fact that pro-life Republicans appear to compensate for their smaller presence among Virginia Republicans through their intensity of concern for the issue and through their presumably greater presence in the activist ranks poses a true challenge to pro-choice Republicans in that state and in similar circumstances. If pro-choice Republicans want to dominate the party debate on the issue or to have their perspectives better accepted, they must raise the importance of this issue to pro-choice Republican voters and mobilize them to turn out in primaries and to become as active in party politics as pro-life Republicans have been. As one Coleman activist observed:

> *I'd say the largest portion of people who were nearer to the party are pro-life. And many of whom got involved for that reason. And normally the nearer people are to the process — the nearer in their involvement — the more active they are.... And most of the people who are nearer to the Republican party are pro-life. It doesn't mean that was the sole reason they got involved. But a lot of them were. And particularly coming up through '88. The largest influxes of new people that the party had were brought in either through George Bush's campaign or Pat Robertson's campaign. And most...of the people that came in from Pat Robertson were pro-life and a lot of those for George Bush too.*

A similar perspective reflecting the relatively lower presence of pro-choice Republicans was expressed by one New Jersey Republican activist:

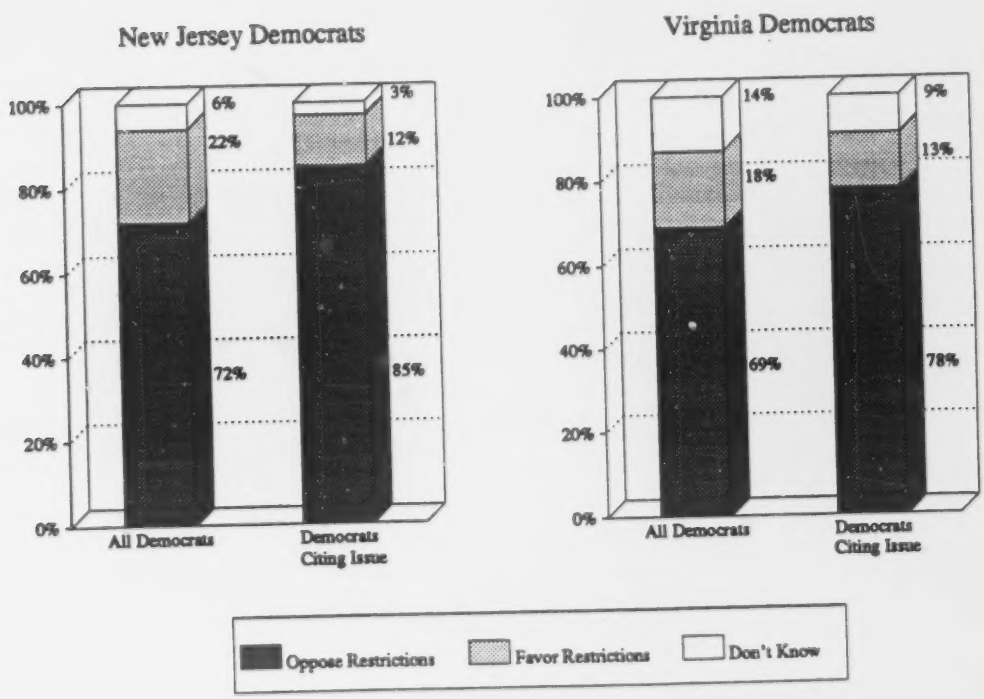
> *The pro-choice contingent in the Republican primary field is virtually non-existent, or at least was pre-*Webster. *We don't know post-*Webster *because we haven't had...[a primary] election since then. Pre-*Webster, *though, it was virtually non-existent. If you have a two person primary, or maybe even a three person primary, that even today in New Jersey I would suspect that the conservative coalition can help put one candidate or another over the top.*

Whether this will change after *Webster* remains to be seen.

Since the 1970's, the Democrats have battled over the issue of abortion; many pointed to the Democratic party's pro-choice position as divisive and as contributing to the decline of the New Deal coalition. For all the conflict the Democrats may have experienced regarding the pro-choice plank in their platform, the Democrats in these two states do not appear to face the problems that the Republicans face on this issue. As Figure 2-14 shows, in both states Democrats are fairly united in opposition to new restrictions on abortion, and the unity is even greater among Democratic mentioners than it is among Democrats as a whole.

That unity may have come at some cost. One reason that the Democrats may appear so united on this issue is that pro-life voters who care passionately about the issue have already defected to the Republican party.

Figure 2-14:
Democrats' Attitudes Toward New Restrictions:
All Versus Those Citing Issue

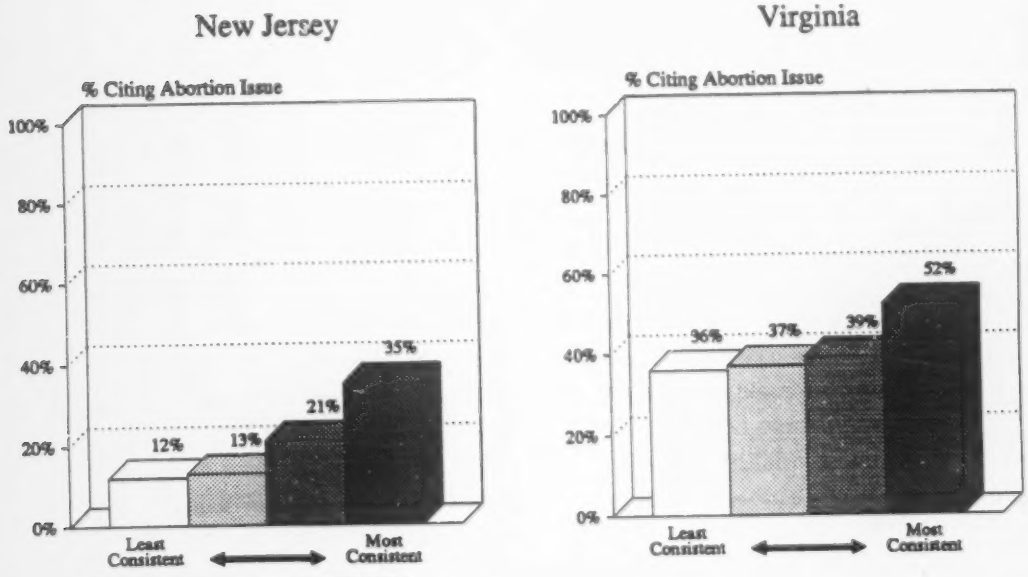


Democratic unity cannot be taken for granted. While pro-life Democrats did not link their general concern for this issue to the gubernatorial elections, the previous chapter noted that pro-life Democrats were just as likely as pro-choice Democrats to see the issue as generally very important. The way the issue was framed in both states as "choice" rather than "abortion" possibly made it a less divisive issue among Democratic voters.

### Attitude Consistency

Figure 2-15 shows that voters with the most consistent attitudes were more likely than the least consistent voters to cite the issue as particularly important in the gubernatorial race.[12] However, the differences between New Jersey and Virginia suggest that the heavier emphasis on the issue and its framing as a libertarian matter in Virginia may have raised the interest level of even conflicted voters in that state, so that those voters were more inclined to connect their concern with the issue to the gubernatorial contest.

Figure 2-15:
% Citing Abortion Issue Given Consistency of Attitudes on Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index




[12]The most consistent scores are those scoring a 0 (consistent pro-life) or 7 (consistent pro-choice) on the pro-life/pro-choice index; those closer to the center of the index showed more mixed feelings, as gauged by their responses to our seven questions.

## PERCEPTION OF CANDIDATE DIFFERENCE

### Awareness of Candidate Positions

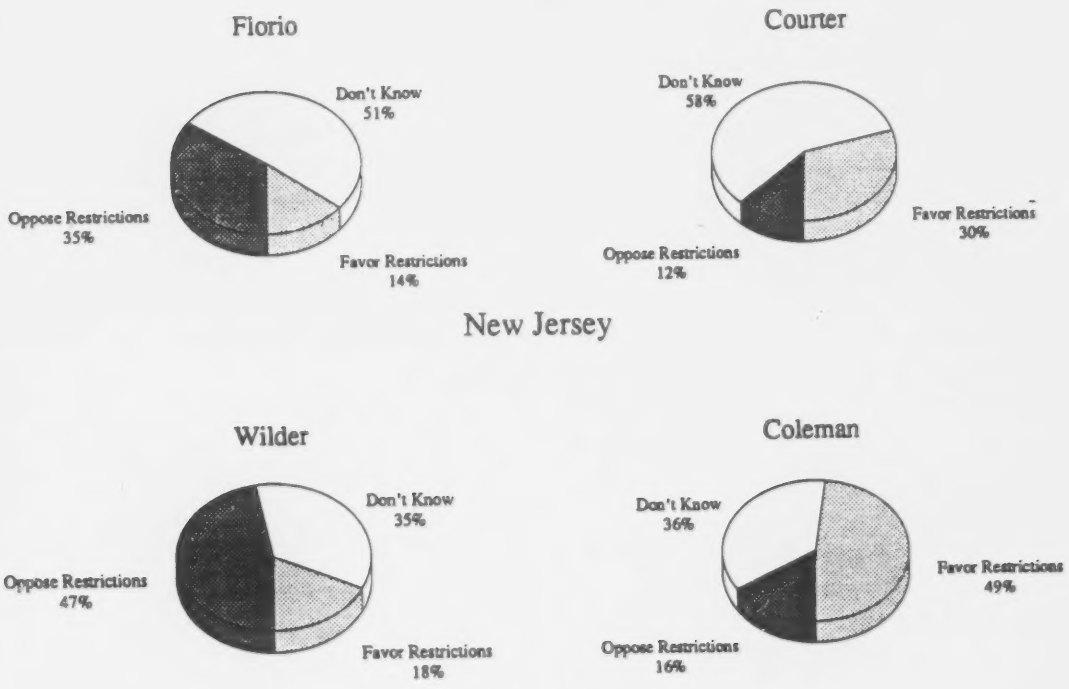
If voters are to cast "issue votes" based on the abortion issue, they should not only see the issue as important in the election, but also know where the candidates stand on the issue and see a difference between them. Determining whether voters know where candidates stand is a difficult endeavor. To assess voter knowledge of candidate stance, for each candidate, voters were asked, "Do you know whether the Democratic/Republican candidate for governor, [candidate name], favors or opposes new government restrictions on abortion?"

Most New Jerseyans did not know where either Florio or Courter stood (Figure 2-16). Of those willing to place the candidates, most voters saw Florio as opposing restrictions and Courter as favoring restrictions. However, about two out of every seven voters who placed the candidates saw Florio as favoring restrictions and about two out of every seven voters saw Courter as opposing restrictions. Courter was obviously unsuccessful in convincing the voters he had changed on the issue.

The voters' inability to place Courter on the issue might have been expected, because the major theme pervading media coverage of his stand on the issue was his inconsistency. However, Florio's stand on the abortion issue was almost as much a mystery to the voters as was Courter's. The reasons for the high percentage of "don't knows" may be: 1) The difficulty New Jersey candidates generally face in getting messages out in a state with no major network television affiliates of its own and 2) the fact that messages aimed at making the issue important were coming more from issue groups and the media than from the candidates.

A comparison of New Jersey and Virginia data suggests that when candidates are clearly divided, and when at least one of the candidates successfully emphasizes this issue during the campaign, the prospects are higher that voters will differentiate the candidates, as required for issue voting. Indeed, in Virginia a plurality of voters said that Wilder opposed restrictions and that Coleman favored restrictions. Only about one third could not place Wilder or Coleman, which suggests Virginia voters were better informed than New Jersey voters. These differences may be the product of the greater visibility of the issue in Virginia, as described earlier. While there may be few issues on which the entire electorate knows where candidates stand, when a campaign emphasized the abortion issue, voter knowledge was greater.

Figure 2-16:
Voters' Perceptions of Candidates'
Positions on Abortion Issue



## Sources of Information

Responses in both states were fairly similar with regard to information sources about each candidate's stand on the abortion issue, with newspapers and television the most likely information sources. At least 80% of voters in both states mentioned each of those two media sources. The next most frequently used information source was radio, with about 44% citing it in Virginia and 34% in New Jersey. To the extent that voter recollections are accurate, the voters using these media tended to use both news reports and political ads. The paid media were important for many voters, and this was especially true in Virginia. Paid ads allow candidates and groups the chance to try framing the debate and educating voters on the issue. However, many voters, and in some cases more of them, relied on news reports. The public's heavy reliance on "free" media was a source of concern for pro-life groups. This is a concern too for any candidate who wishes to avoid the issue. Issue group activity (e.g., marches and press conferences) and legislative action on this issue will likely be necessary to ensure the continued "newsworthiness" of abortion policy in future elections.

Besides "free" media coverage, other information sources were useful to voters. In both states, about one out of every four voters got information about the candidates from family and friends. A small proportion also learned where the candidates stood from religious groups and leaders; this source was more frequently cited by proponents of new restrictions than by opponents. Virginians were more likely than New Jersey voters to report that phone calls from issue groups provided information on the candidates' stands on the abortion topic.

## Perception of Meaningful Difference Between Candidates

If a voter has no personal position on the issue, seeing a difference between the candidates is meaningless. Therefore, we require that voters not only differentiate between the candidates, but also have personal stands on the issue that would allow them to see one candidate as closer to themselves. We call these voters "differentiators."[13]

[13]Due to the problem of distinguishing between a restriction such as parental consent and restrictions like viability testing or an outright ban on abortion, we asked voters seeing a candidate as favoring restrictions whether they thought that candidate favored major or minor ones. Therefore, if a voter saw both candidates as favoring restrictions but saw Florio or Wilder as favoring minor restrictions, and Courter or Coleman as favoring major restrictions, they were considered as differentiating between the candidates. The same question was used to determine where voters stood and where the voters thought the candidates stood.

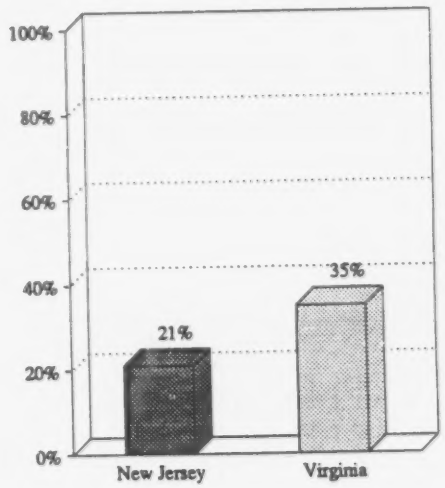
Figure 2-17 shows that Virginia voters were more likely to be differentiators, fulfilling both prerequisites for perceiving a meaningful difference and thus for potential issue voting.[14] While these are far from majorities of voters, in close races such voters can have a profound impact on election outcomes:

> *The Wilder campaign put essentially all of its eggs in the abortion basket. And it was rightfully so. They made exactly the right tactical decision. If they had made any other decision, we would have won the election.* (Coleman campaign activist)

Figure 2-18 suggests also that the *way* the issue was framed helped Wilder. A differentiator favoring new restrictions who saw the Republican candidate as more favorable toward restrictions than the Democrat has the potential to cast an issue vote for the Republican; a differentiator opposing new restrictions who saw the Republican candidate as more favorable toward restrictions than the Democrat has issue vote potential favoring the Democratic candidate. The figure shows the total proportion of "differentiators" at each point on the pro-life/pro-choice index. The shading indicates the percent of differentiators at each point whose self-placement and candidate perceptions suggest the potential to cast an issue vote for a particular candidate.

In Virginia, at each point on the scale above 2, the proportion of voters seeing a meaningful difference with the potential to cast an issue vote for Wilder exceeds the proportion with the potential to cast an issue vote for Coleman. Clearly,

Figure 2-17:
% of Voters Who Are Differentiators




[14]Those who differentiated between the candidates by defining Courter or Coleman as *opposing* new restrictions and Florio or Wilder as *favoring* new restrictions are not considered as having issue vote potential. These voters appear to have projected their own views onto their preferred candidate. We label this small group of voters "confused" in the next section.

Wilder was better able to reach his natural constituency of pro-choice voters than Coleman was to reach pro-life voters. Furthermore, Wilder was more successful than Coleman in reaching the conflicted voters in the center of our index. The campaign messages apparently led them to see differences between the candidates' stands *and* made more of them see themselves as being closer to Wilder than to Coleman.

Similar patterns occur among New Jersey voters, but there are important differences between the states. Fewer New Jersey voters at any point on the scale are differentiators and thus fewer had the potential for an issue vote. Moreover, New Jersey voters on the pro-choice leaning end of the scale were only slightly more likely to be differentiators than their counterparts on the pro-life end; the pro-choice end of the scale was clearly better mobilized than the pro-life end of the scale in Virginia. However, pro-life leaning voters in New Jersey were only slightly less likely to be differentiators than their Virginia counterparts. This would indicate that New Jersey pro-lifers were only slightly less likely to have issue vote potential than were their Virginia counterparts. In contrast, pro-choice leaners in Virginia were much more likely to differentiate and thus were better equipped to cast an issue vote than were their New Jersey counterparts.

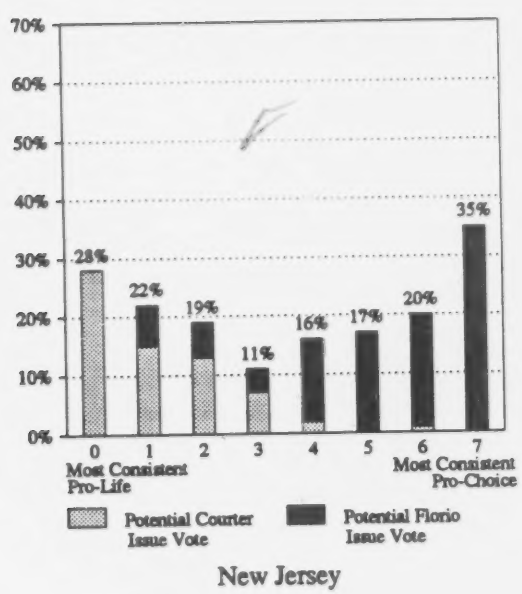
This similarity between the pro-life voters' issue vote potential in the two states suggests that either: 1) campaign efforts in Virginia to educate pro-life leaning voters about the candidates' stands on the issue were relatively ineffective compared to the efforts on the pro-choice side; and/or 2) the Courter campaign's message that the candidate had changed his position on abortion was not fully convincing, either to pro-life leaning voters who were supporting him based on his former stance, or to pro-choice leaning voters who might vote against him because of it.

## CONVERTING ISSUE VOTE POTENTIAL INTO ISSUE VOTES: CHOOSING THE CLOSER CANDIDATE

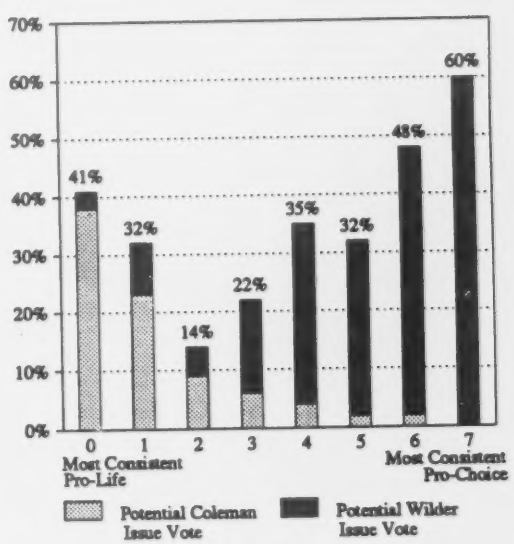
In the post-*Webster* era, a critical question is whether voters who meet our criteria as potential issue voters do actually cast their ballots based on the issue. To address this question, we first examine the composition of voters in each candidate's coalition to determine their issue attitudes and candidate perceptions. Then we consider how each candidate was advantaged or disadvantaged among voters with different personal views about restrictions, perceptions of the candidates' stands, and attitudes about the importance of the issue in the gubernatorial race.

We classify the voters into groups based on their positions on the issue and their perceptions of candidates' stands. (The first figure in parentheses indicates the

Figure 2-18:
Percent of Voters Who Are Differentiators
Given Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index Score




New Jersey




Virginia

proportion of Virginia voters and the second figure the proportion of New Jersey voters in each group.):[15]

- *Differentiating Pro-Life*: Voter favors new government restrictions and views Coleman or Courter as more favorable toward restrictions than Wilder or Florio (9%; 5%).

- *Non-Differentiating Pro-Life*: Voter favors new government restrictions, but is either unable to place both candidates on this issue or sees no difference between the candidates (15%; 19%). Most are uninformed rather than unconvinced of difference.

- *Differentiating Pro-Choice*: Voter opposes new government restrictions and places Coleman or Courter as more in favor of restrictions than Wilder or Florio (27%; 15%).

- *Non-Differentiating Pro-Choice*: Voter opposes new government restrictions, but is either unable to place both candidates on this issue or sees no difference between the candidates (28%; 49%). Again, most are uninformed rather than unconvinced of difference.

- *Uncertain*: Voter is unable to say whether he or she personally favors or opposes new government restrictions (14%; 8%).

- *Confused Pro-Life*: Voter favors new government restrictions, but sees Coleman or Courter as opposing and Wilder or Florio as favoring new government restrictions.(2%; 1%)

- *Confused Pro-Choice*: Voter opposes new government restrictions on abortion, but sees Coleman or Courter as opposing and Wilder or Florio as favoring new government restrictions.(5%; 3%)

Our primary focus is on the first five of these seven groups.

We also classified voters into electoral coalitions based on their stated voting intentions expressed in our pre-election surveys. Those who did not know who they

[15]Twelve percent in Virginia and 11% in New Jersey saw the Republican and Democratic gubernatorial candidates as having the same position regarding new restrictions.

would support or who refused to respond to the question were classified based on responses to other relevant questions aimed at indirectly measuring affect toward candidates. The results of our allocation procedures mirrored closely the actual election results.[16]

## Issue Attitudes and Knowledge Among Voters Supporting Each Candidate

Florio's and Wilder's electoral coalitions were comprised primarily of voters opposing new restrictions (Figures 2-19 and 2-21). Courter and Coleman had larger proportions of voters favoring new restrictions in their coalitions than did their Democratic rivals (Figures 2-20 and 2-22). However, a plurality of Coleman supporters and a majority of Courter supporters were pro-choice. Figures 2-20 and 2-22 show that Coleman and Courter won most of their pro-choice support from non-differentiating pro-choice voters, just as most of Wilder and Florio's pro-life support came from non-differentiating pro-life voters.

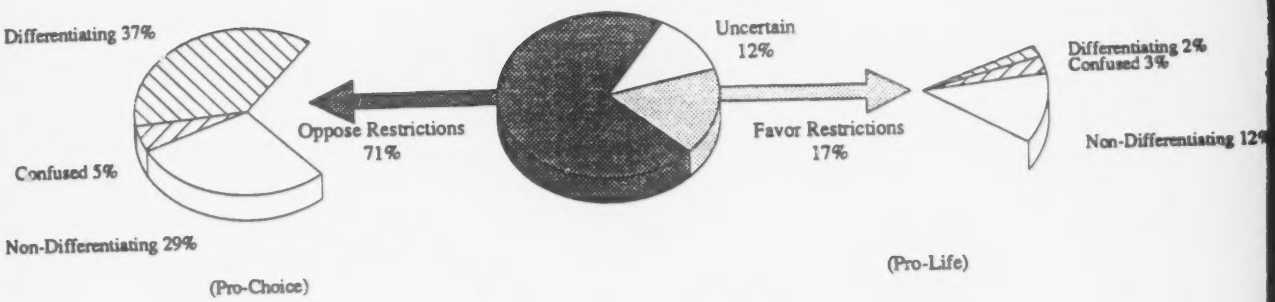
***The Wilder Coalition***. The high correspondence between Wilder's position on the issue and Wilder voters' attitudes on the issue was partially a product of high voter knowledge and partially a product of luck. A plurality of the Wilder voters were pro-choice voters aware of candidate differences, and the next largest group within the Wilder coalition was the non-differentiating pro-choice voters who must have voted for Wilder for other reasons.

***The Coleman Coalition***. It was astute strategy for the Coleman campaign to attempt to downplay the issue, given that the largest of the voter groups supporting Coleman was the non-differentiating pro-choice voters.[17] Virtually tied for second place are non-differentiating pro-life voters, uncertain voters, differentiating pro-life voters, and differentiating pro-choice voters. The fact that a plurality of Coleman supporters were non-differentiating pro-choice voters suggests that if these voters had been educated more fully about where the candidates stood, Coleman's margin of loss (which was less than half a percentage point) would have been greater; had voter

[16]For more details, see Appendix.

[17]The apparently small role played by differentiating pro-life voters in the general election contrasts with their apparent influence in the Republican primary. The contrast suggests conservatives are clearly more important in primaries, which must be won in order to get to general elections. Conservative pro-life supporters may play a much more important role as activists than they do as voters in the general election contest.

## Figure 2-19:
## Wilder's Electoral Coalition:
## Attitudes and Perceptions




## Figure 2-20:
## Coleman's Electoral Coalition:
## Attitudes and Perceptions

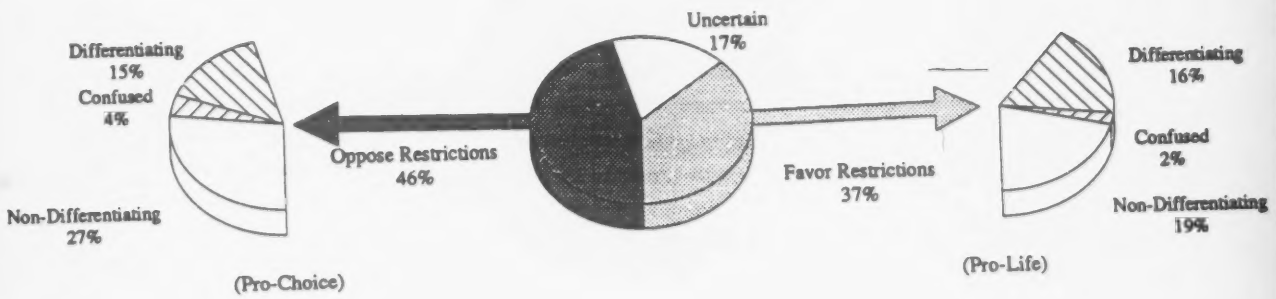


Figure 2-21:
Florio's Electoral Coalition:
Attitudes and Perceptions

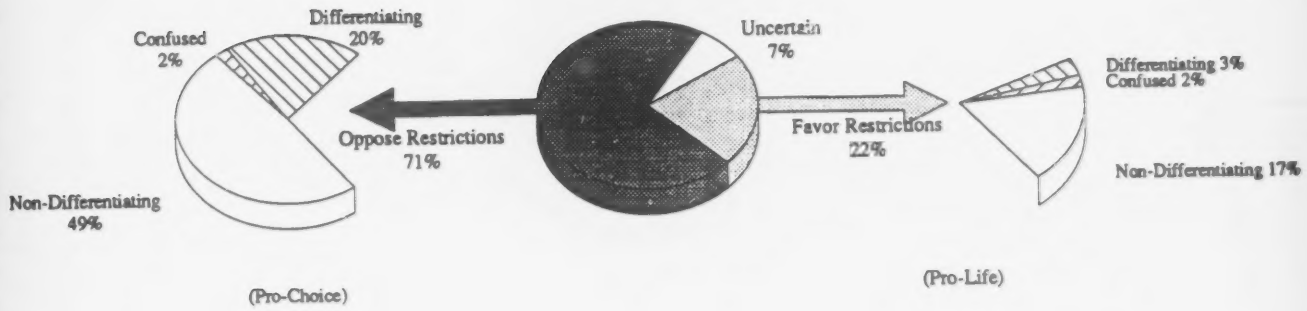
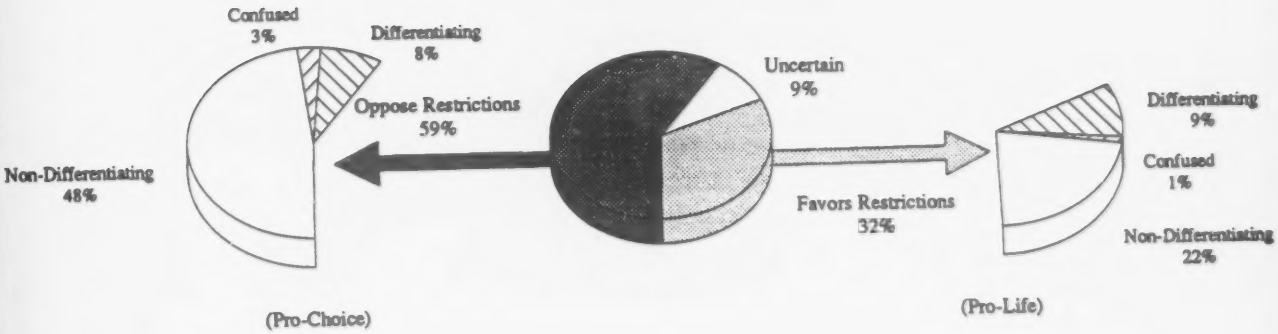



Figure 2-22:
Courter's Electoral Coalition:
Attitudes and Perceptions



knowledge been less, Coleman might very well have won the election. If elections are to ensure representation on this issue, voters need to be well informed, but tactically speaking, baffling the voters may serve the interests of those who find themselves on the less popular side of public opinion.

> *The tactical decision was made by the Coleman forces for weeks and weeks and weeks to just let it lie,...but they made no effort to reframe it until the very, very end. They made no effort at all and so I don't know whether it would have worked or not because they didn't try.... I think it would have made a big difference. At the very least, like I said, this is a very tactical thing to admit, but at the very least you confuse the poor voter, so he starts looking for something else to vote on. Get them all muddled up.* (Virginia Republican activist)

This must have been the hope of one loyal Coleman activist who attempted to appease both pro-choice and pro-life Republicans until the task became overwhelming:

> *I'd get on the phone and if they were pro-choice and going berserk about all of this, I would just talk about him.... Just basically that the governor can't do anything, he just sets the standard.... Then I'd get a pro-life [voter] on...who just doesn't know what to do, he's going to sit it out and I'd find myself two minutes later going, "The governor of Virginia is the most powerful governor in the nation.... Don't you understand [what] he could do for the unborn child?"*

The Coleman campaign could not control the content or flow of information on this issue.

***The Florio Coalition***. Almost half of Florio voters were non-differentiating pro-choice voters, which contrasts sharply with Wilder's heavy support from differentiating pro-choice voters in Virginia. This difference may be the product of the lesser emphasis on the abortion issue relative to other issues in New Jersey, and to a lesser extent it could also be the result of confusion over how much Courter differed from Florio. Tied for second place in importance within his coalition were differentiating pro-choice voters and non-differentiating pro-life voters. The former may have been voting on the basis of this issue, but the latter obviously were not.

***The Courter Coalition***. As with Florio, Courter's largest group of supporters was non-differentiating pro-choice voters followed by non-differentiating

pro-life voters. Differentiating pro-choice and pro-life voters virtually tied for third place with the uncertain voters in their contribution to the coalition. Clearly, the less central the issue is to the campaign, the lower the potential for issue voting.

## Effect of Issue Vote Potential on Candidate Support

Figures 2-23 through 2-27 illustrate the impact of issue position, perceptions of candidates' stands, and saliency of the issue for voting decisions, by showing the electoral advantage — the margin by which a particular candidate is preferred — in each of our five basic groups of voters.[18] If voters with similar views about the issue have different perceptions of candidates' stands or assessments of the issue's importance and choose different candidates, then the issue may have influenced their votes.[19]

***Patterns of Support Statewide***. Voters' issue positions and level of information influenced their support for the candidates in both states. Figure 2-23 shows that Wilder carried both pro-choice groups, but that he carried the differentiators by a larger margin than the non-differentiators. Similarly, Coleman carried the two pro-life groups, as well as the uncertain group. As with Wilder, his margin was greater among the differentiators who shared his views about abortion restrictions.

The crucial role that perceptions of difference play in influencing whether or not the issue affects elections (and the extent to which voters treat elections as referenda) is illustrated by our findings from New Jersey. Figure 2-23 also shows that the differentiating pro-life group was the only group among whom Courter had an advantage. The remaining four groups supported Florio, but Florio's electoral advantage was greatest among differentiating pro-choicers.

However, perceptions of differences did not ensure that voters would convert their views into votes reflecting those views. Voters had to care about the issue.

---

[18]If one candidate had won 50% and another candidate had won 50%, there would have been no advantage to either candidate and the score would be zero. Similarly, if Coleman had received 75% of the support of one group and Wilder had gotten 25%, there would have been a 50 point advantage for Coleman. If Wilder garnered 75% of the votes in one group and Coleman received 25% of the group's support, there would be a 50 point electoral advantage for Wilder.

[19]The size of the bars reflects the size of the group relative to others displayed in each boxed area. For example, in New Jersey (Figure 2-23) there are three times as many non-differentiating pro-choice voters as differentiating pro-choice voters. Therefore, the bar for the non-differentiating group is three times as wide as that for their differentiating counterparts.

Figures 2-24 and 2-25 illustrate that this was particularly true of pro-choice voters. Wilder's advantage was greatest among differentiating pro-choice mentioners who saw the issue as important. The Wilder advantage was much lower, and sometimes non-existent, among non-differentiating pro-choice voters and among differentiating pro-choicers who did not mention the issue as important (Figure 2-24). Having adequate information to distinguish between candidates and seeing the importance of converting concern for the issue into ballot box action was crucial in Virginia, where the differences were sharply drawn and emphasized by Wilder.

Coleman's advantage seemed to be somewhat less influenced by issue importance among the differentiating pro-life voters than Wilder's was among differentiating pro-choice voters. This is probably because 82% of the differentiating pro-life voters in Virginia are Republicans. Given Coleman's high level of support among pro-lifers, particularly the informed pro-life "mentioners," one problem for him was that these voters were such a small proportion of the Virginia electorate.

## Figure 2-23:
## Electoral Advantage For Gubernatorial Candidates Among New Jersey and Virginia Voter Groups

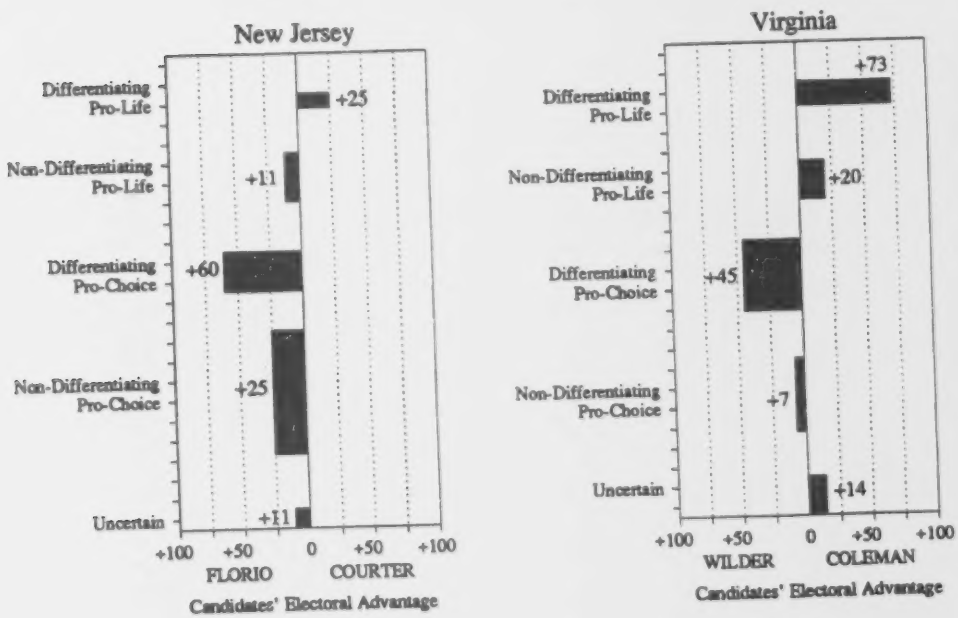


Figure 2-24:
Electoral Advantage For Candidates
Among Virginia Voter Groups
Given Importance of Abortion Issue in Gubernatorial Race

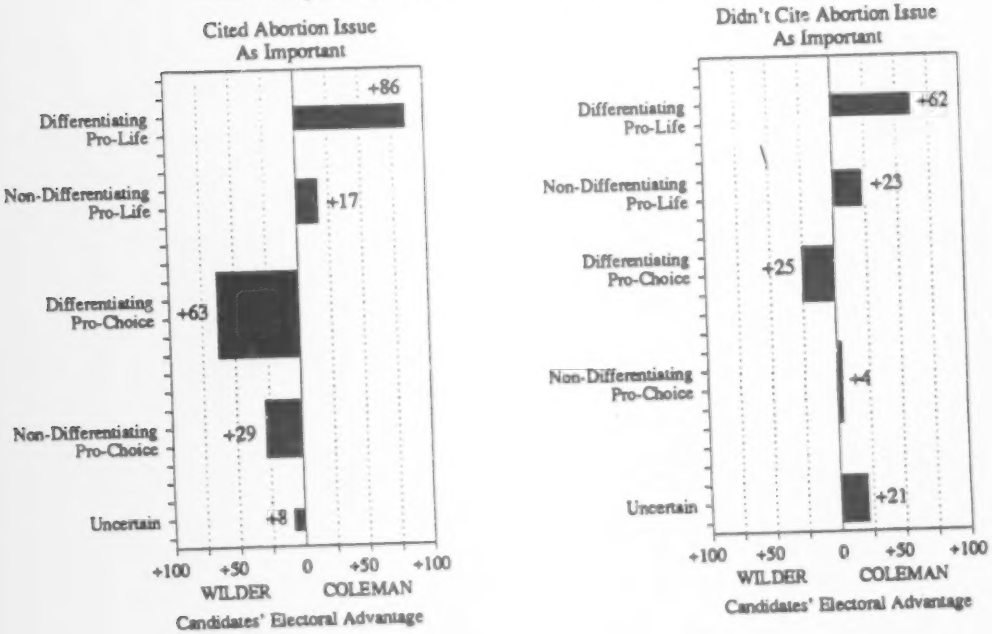
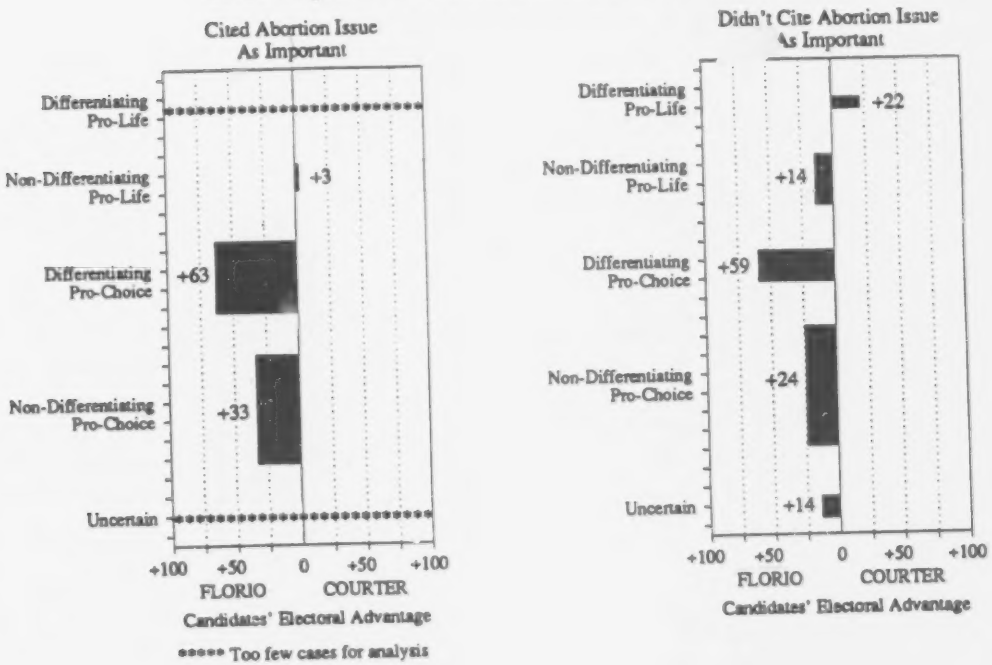


Figure 2-25:
Electoral Advantage For Candidates
Among New Jersey Voter Groups
Given Importance of Abortion Issue in Gubernatorial Race

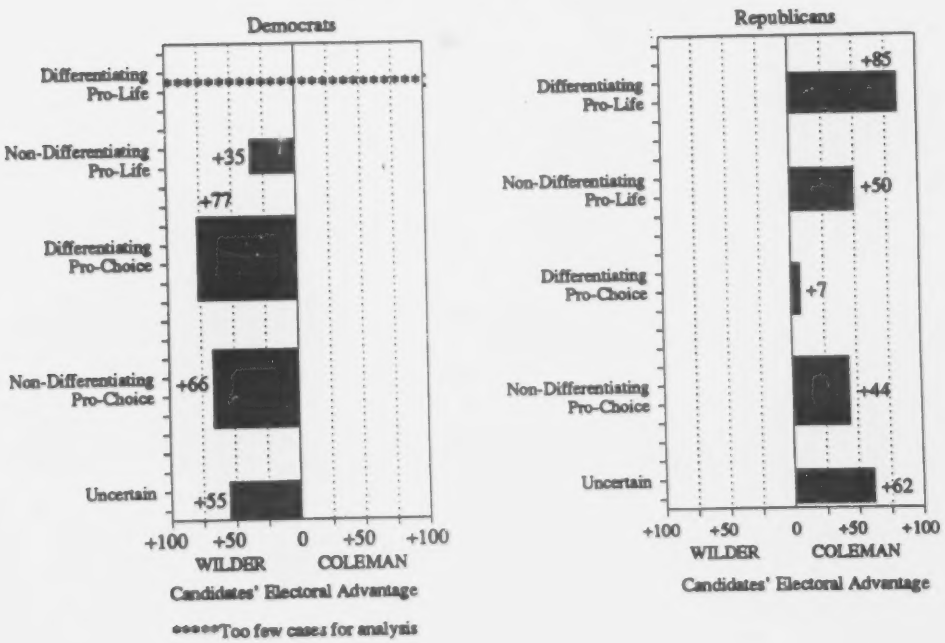


In contrast to the situation in Virginia, importance of the issue had little influence on candidates' electoral advantages among the voter groups in New Jersey (Figure 2-25). This is probably because it played a less central role in campaign messages in New Jersey and because of Courter's general image problems arising from his handling of the issue. Seeing a difference between Florio and Courter could be interpreted as questioning Courter's integrity, given his often awkward and seemingly unsuccessful attempts at conveying his new, more pro-choice message.

***Importance of Party Identification: Virginia.*** To ensure that party loyalty alone does not account for these differences, we will briefly look at patterns of support among Republicans and Democrats.

Because Republican voters are more divided over abortion than Democrats in Virginia, this issue makes it particularly difficult for Republican candidates to keep their natural base together for the general election. Coleman's campaign needed to

Figure 2-26:
Electoral Advantage For Gubernatorial Candidates
Among Virginia Voter Groups By Party



keep pro-choice Republican voters in the fold, attract independents, and at the same time, make his pro-life credentials clear enough to keep pro-life voters and activists involved in the campaign.

The toll that the resurgence of the abortion issue exacted from Coleman's natural partisan constituency is clear in Figure 2-26. Coleman's electoral advantage was greatest among differentiating pro-life Republicans and smallest among differentiating pro-choice Republicans. His electoral advantage among non-differentiating pro-choice Republicans and non-differentiating pro-life Republicans was about equal, suggesting that his pro-life position did not hurt or help him among those who lacked adequate information for an issue vote.

Coleman's major source of defections was differentiating Republican women. Differentiating pro-choice Republican women gave *Wilder* a 19 point electoral advantage, while their male counterparts gave Coleman a 30 point electoral advantage. Women and men who were non-differentiating pro-choice voters were equally likely to support Coleman. Differentiating pro-choice Republican women were more than twice as likely as their male counterparts to see the abortion issue as important in the race. When Republican voters were pro-choice differentiators who saw abortion as important, the issue often took precedence over party ties and many were willing to vote for Wilder. This bears out the observation of two Republican legislative candidates, who surmised:

> *If [Coleman] had been able to sway people's minds to vote on an issue other than abortion, then he would have won. The problem is in northern Virginia, we have...a large number of working women who are of child-bearing age for whom abortion is of a particular interest...and I think those women traditionally had been voting Republican for pocketbook reasons,...but in this particular one those issues were completely overshadowed by the abortion debate.*
>
> *The young women went to the polls in record numbers. Older women who'd been working for the Republican party for years [did so too]....[One said to me] "I've never voted Democrat in my life." This woman is past her reproduction period. She said, "I'm concerned about my children and my grandchildren's rights. I'm working against Coleman." And she was just angry.*

Coleman had little control over the information that voters acquired about the candidates' stands. His campaign also lost the battle to make this issue seem unimportant, at least to many voters. Some people argue that if he had reframed the debate, redefining "pro-choice" and "pro-life," he could have made Wilder appear

extremist and turned it to his advantage. We cannot test this with our data, but we can conclude that given the way the issue was framed, information and issue saliency were a politically volatile mix among pro-choice Republicans in Virginia.[20]

Wilder needed to appeal to Republican and independent pro-choice voters without alienating pro-life Democrats. His task of holding his "natural base" together while using his pro-choice position was easier than Coleman's, because: 1) The *Webster* decision apparently changed a pro-choice position into more of an asset than it had been in the past; 2) Democratic voters were more homogenous on this issue than were their Republican counterparts; and 3) The voters Wilder might have lost due to his pro-choice stance were probably already lost because of his race.[21]

Framing the issue as one of government intervention into individuals' lives allowed the Wilder campaign to define their candidate as taking a conservative stance with regard to government's role. This allowed Wilder to maximize his vote potential on the issue; those Democrats who defected probably would have done so regardless of his position on this issue.

> *It [the issue] was positioned as a conservative position which was fundamentally to keep government out of people's lives. And under that positioning the down side on the issue is minimized.... I don't think there were many votes lost that Governor Wilder would have gotten otherwise.* (Wilder campaign activist)

It was Wilder's good fortune that only 1 out of 5 pro-life Democrats were differentiators and had the potential to cast an issue vote for Coleman. The fact that the majority of Democratic pro-life voters were non-differentiators, yet gave him a lower electoral advantage than other groups, suggests that other factors (perhaps race or ideology) played a role in the voting decisions of these more conservative Democrats. Thus, Wilder's stance on the abortion issue was, overall, an apparent plus for him because it attracted differentiating pro-choice Republicans without costing him too many Democrats. Conversely, any inroads that Coleman made among these largely non-differentiating pro-life Democrats were probably related less to his

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[20]Nevertheless, one must keep in mind that Coleman's pro-life stand may have benefitted him in ways that cannot be measured by looking at patterns of voter support. There is little doubt that the pro-life coalition was important in his primary victory; and we should not underestimate the importance of keeping activists, who invest a great deal of their time in a campaign, content and satisfied that the candidate will do what they would like.

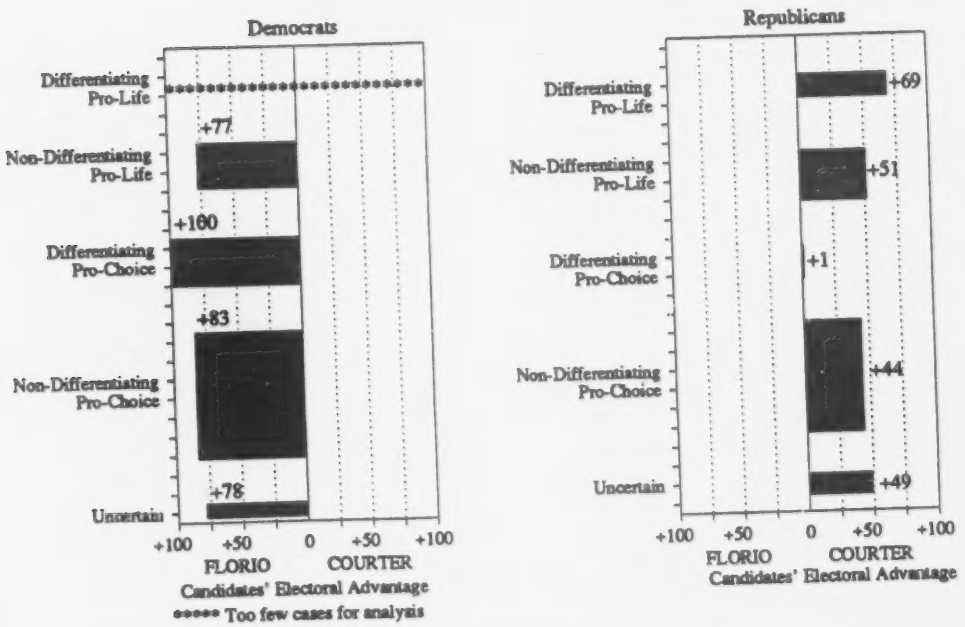
[21]There was a statistically significant tendency for voters favoring new restrictions on abortion to express unfavorable attitudes toward the Martin Luther King holiday.

pro-life position than to other concerns. Regardless of where Coleman *or* Wilder stood on the abortion issue, many of those non-differentiating Democrats who crossed party lines probably would have done so regardless of the abortion issue.

Indeed, the Wilder campaign succeeded in getting its message across to its pro-choice Democratic base, since his greatest advantage was among differentiating pro-choice Democrats. He was able to accomplish this without mobilizing pro-life Democrats on this issue. The Coleman campaign was less successful in getting its pro-life message across without driving away many pro-choice Republicans.

***Importance of Party Identification: New Jersey.*** As with Coleman, Courter's greatest margin of victory within the Republican party was among differentiating pro-lifers, while he barely broke even among differentiating pro-choicers (Figure 2-27). Courter's handling of the abortion issue may have cut both

Figure 2-27:
Electoral Advantage For Gubernatorial Candidates
Among New Jersey Voter Groups By Party



ways. There were more non-differentiating pro-choice and pro-life Republicans in New Jersey than in Virginia. The former group may have helped him, while the latter group may have hurt him. A Courter activist's comment seems to bear this out:

> *What we ended up finding out were a lot of Republican-leaning independents who were critical to the election ended up drifting to Florio because of the appearance of wishy-washiness.*

Differentiating pro-choice Republicans defected to Florio at a higher rate than other Republicans. Like Coleman, Courter's problem among differentiating pro-choice Republicans was due to Republican women defecting to the candidate they viewed as pro-choice, while differentiating pro-choice Republican men were more forgiving of this perceived disagreement.[22]

That most pro-choice Republicans could not differentiate between the candidates was an advantage because it meant fewer were in the group most prone to defection. This "advantage" was neither sought nor cheaply won. The confusion over Courter's position on the issue may have made it easier for him to keep more of the pro-choice Republicans than Coleman did; nevertheless, it was a source of a great deal of controversy which affected the ability of his campaign to communicate desired messages. Ultimately, it may have hurt his credibility among voters who cared nothing about the abortion issue, but found themselves questioning his leadership abilities. Those differentiating pro-choice Republicans who did not mention abortion as important might have been casting a vote that was partly pro-choice, but also partly anti-Courter.

In New Jersey as in Virginia, the Democratic candidate faced fewer problems in dealing with this issue than did the Republican. While Florio's greatest margin of victory was among differentiating pro-choice Democrats, he did well among all Democratic voters. Not only were pro-life Democrats a small proportion of the party, they were also less likely to differentiate between the candidates than pro-life Republicans were, with only about one out of every seven doing so. This is possibly because Courter was shifting his position and Florio was not aggressively using the issue. Florio's high level of support among all Democratic groups bears out what has already been reported in the media: Florio had an extremely good campaign year.

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[22]The differentiating pro-choice men in our sample gave Courter an electoral advantage of 20 points, while their female counterparts gave *Florio* a 27 point electoral advantage. However, the number of cases in both groups are small.

## CONCLUSION

In the first two states to hold general elections in the post-*Webster* era, the abortion issue affected the gubernatorial elections in three ways:

- **The abortion issue shaped the agenda because it affected the messages that candidates were able to send to the voters directly and through the media.** *Webster* encouraged Wilder to use the issue more heavily than otherwise and it forced Coleman and Courter to address the issue despite their desire to avoid it and focus on other topics.

- **It affected the campaigns by increasing the pool of activists available to the candidates — particularly on the pro-choice side.** This provided the candidates with allies who were alternative, albeit uncontrollable, sources of information for educating voters.

- **It affected patterns of voter support for the candidates.** Its effect was greater in Virginia, where more voters differentiated between the candidates, but similar patterns were observed in New Jersey as well. Information about the candidates was crucial, and it was something that no candidate could control if faced with an astute and persistent challenger. In 1989 pro-choice Republicans (more often women than men) defected in greater numbers than other Republicans to the Democratic candidate if they perceived their party's nominee as pro-life and the Democrat as pro-choice. The result was that there were very small gains for Florio in New Jersey and much larger gains for Wilder in Virginia. Whether early attempts at framing the issue in terms of "abortion on demand" or "murdering the unborn children for convenience" would have countered or overcome attempts to frame the issue as a libertarian issue of "choice" remains an unanswered question.

# CHAPTER 3:
# THE LEGISLATIVE RACES

# INTRODUCTION

If legislatures never pass new laws regulating abortion, then governors will have little opportunity to change abortion laws. Elections decide who will serve in legislatures, and thus they decide indirectly the fate of abortion rights policy in the states. As with gubernatorial elections, the voters' concerns about the issue and their knowledge of candidates' stands determine whether voters translate their issue concerns into votes. This, in turn, will determine whether these elections are referenda on the issue and may affect whether legislative action reflects the will of the people.

Yet legislative elections differ from gubernatorial elections in ways that make it far less likely that voters will translate concern about abortion into issue votes. Legislative elections are then less likely to be referenda on the issue because:[1]

- **Voters are less informed about legislative elections.** Approximately one out of ten voters said they knew practically nothing about the gubernatorial candidates. Almost five out of ten voters said this about the legislative candidates.

- **Voters are less interested in legislative elections.** Getting the voters to pay attention to information is a challenge and may reflect a complete lack of understanding on the part of some voters about the impact legislators have on laws. As one candidate's wife observed: "The majority of people don't even know what a delegate is.... I mean, how many people said, 'What is that your husband is running for?' 'House of Delegates.' 'What's that? I don't think I've ever voted in that one before.'"

[1]Lack of competition in general elections also makes referenda less likely. Only 40 of the 100 Virginia House of Delegates districts matched Republicans against Democrats, and only an additional five districts had independent challengers who won at least 10% of the vote. Therefore, the number of districts in which this issue could play an important role in the general elections in Virginia was limited. The voters did not seem particularly aware of the lack of two-party competition in many of the districts in which they lived. Because we could not determine easily which of the phone numbers from our statewide sample were in districts with competition, we asked all voters general questions about the Democratic and Republican delegate candidates. Less than two percent of the voters volunteered that there was no Democrat/Republican running for delegate in their district, when over half of the voters should have given this response. There was two-party competition in all 40 districts in New Jersey.

The first part of this chapter examines the abortion issue from the legislative candidates' perspectives, focusing on: 1) the impact of the issue on the elections for the lower house of the legislature in both states — the House of Delegates in Virginia and the General Assembly in New Jersey; 2) implications for campaign-based ties with issue groups; and 3) implications for party unity. The second half of the chapter examines the extent to which voters link their issue concerns to their votes in these legislative elections and the extent to which legislative elections can be interpreted as evidence of the will of the voters on this issue.

The structure of legislative elections in the two states differs in one very important way. In Virginia, the legislative districts are single-member, and thus voters choose only one person to represent them. In New Jersey, the legislative districts are multi-member, with each voter having two votes which can be cast for any two of the (typically) four candidates running, regardless of party. Neither state held elections for the upper house in 1989.

Several methodological points should also be kept in mind. First, we interviewed legislators only from districts where the issue might have been important. Within the 13 districts selected, we interviewed 43 New Jersey assembly candidates; 47 House of Delegates candidates were interviewed from 31 districts in Virginia (see Appendix for more details). Therefore, the legislators do not represent all legislators in the state although they are representative of legislators from districts where the issue might be important. Second, the interviews were conducted as relatively unstructured conversations and the proportions holding certain perspectives on various issues were derived by coders reading the transcripts. While the coders were generally consistent in their assessments of the transcripts, these are interpretations and may vary slightly from reader to reader.

## THE CANDIDATES' PERSPECTIVES

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE

About four out of every ten New Jersey candidates interviewed and about half of the Virginia candidates actually saw the abortion issue as important in their own campaigns. Almost no one saw it as the only issue important in the legislative campaign, but it was at least one of the important concerns. In Virginia, there were regional differences, with two-thirds of candidates from northern Virginia districts,

but only one-third from downstate, describing the issue as important in their own races. The biggest differences in New Jersey were by party. Even though they were running in the same districts, Democratic assembly candidates were more likely than the Republican candidates to see the issue as important (about half compared to one-third).

The *Webster* decision changed many of the candidates' contacts with the voters in their districts. Very few who had held state legislative office or campaigned before July 1989 reported frequent pre-*Webster* contacts about the abortion issue. In comparison, almost half of the New Jersey candidates and slightly more than half of the Virginia candidates who could characterize their post-*Webster* contacts reported they were contacted often about the issue. The regional differences in Virginia were quite sharp on this question. Only one out of three legislative candidates outside of northern Virginia remembered being contacted often after *Webster*, compared to more than 4 out of 5 northern Virginia candidates who did so.

Of those whose responses could be categorized, about half of the New Jersey candidates and slightly more in Virginia reported predominantly pro-choice contacts following the Court's decision:

> *I noticed going door-to-door...that it was something that women did ask very directly at the door.... [W]hen I had run two years previously, the only time the subject had ever come up was [with] the pro-lifers.... Every time the question was asked [this time] it was somebody from pro-choice. So it was different.*

> *I averaged two calls a day.... The calls were overwhelmingly pro-choice and they were from women and they were from people who could identify themselves as Republican women.... I didn't get any [pro-life] calls but I did get stopped by people who were pro-life who registered their disappointment with me for taking that stance. But for every one that did, ten people said they had no problem with my position.*

The second most common reply was that the contacts were about equally divided between pro-choice and pro-life supporters. This was the case for about one-fourth of the Virginia candidates and for two-fifths of the New Jersey candidates'. Consistently pro-life contacts were seldom mentioned.

When the issue became important in a candidate's race, it was not always because the candidate wanted it to be so. Indeed, only about one fourth of the Virginia legislative candidates we spoke with wanted abortion to become an issue, compared to half who stated or implied they did not want the issue to be prominent

in their campaigns. In New Jersey, candidates were more evenly divided in their views about making the issue relevant to the race, with about half wanting it to be an issue and slightly less than half appearing to hope the issue would go away. Those wishing it would subside often had different reasons for doing so:

> *It's an awfully controversial issue. I'm not sure that I truly would have liked it to be brought to a head. It's one that you don't bring up unless somebody brings it up to you because it's...such a gut feeling for people.*

> *If we [my running mate and I] had been united — if we had been both pro-choice, I think we would have attacked [the pro-life opponent] who called it murder.... If we had been both pro-life, I think we would have gone after [the pro-choice opponent] for signing [NOW's] mail petition. But because we were at odds...I would say because of that dichotomy, it wasn't a big issue.*

> *Personally I never felt comfortable even discussing this. It annoyed me...that this became a big issue after I got into the race.... I thought it was just nonsense. It was just played out too much in the press. There was a point in the campaign when I thought of even dropping out because of this.... I don't want to be on a soapbox and have people say to me...you're pro-choice, you're killing babies. I don't mind exposing myself to property taxes, to growth management, to the things we talked about, but not to this issue. So that's how personal I thought it was.... I was uncomfortable with the issue from day one. Not with my stand, just with the issue itself.*

In both states, Democrats were more likely than Republicans to show enthusiasm about making abortion an issue. This was probably due to: 1) Democrats being more likely to be pro-choice and thus reflecting the apparent confidence that accompanied the post-*Webster* resurgence of pro-choice support and 2) the divisiveness the issue created for pro-choice Republicans seeking to hold together their base.[2]

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[2]About half of the New Jersey Republicans interviewed were endorsed by the pro-life PAC, while just under one-third were endorsed by pro-choice groups. Approximately three out of four New Jersey Democrats interviewed were endorsed by pro-choicers, compared with about 15% who were pro-life endorsed. Similarly, Republicans in Virginia were far more likely to have been endorsed by pro-life than by the pro-choice groups, and the reverse was true for their Democratic opponents.

## WHY THE ISSUE BECAME IMPORTANT

Four factors seemed to influence whether the abortion issue would be important in an election: 1) attempts by one or more candidates in the race to make it an issue, 2) media coverage, 3) the gubernatorial campaign events, and 4) issue group activity. However, they were no guarantees that the issue would actually be important in these races.

### Candidate Initiative

The issue seemed unlikely to become important unless at least one legislative candidate tried to make it an important point in the campaign. Candidates who wanted to make the issue important were more likely to be successful if they could force their opposition to debate on the issue or if they could define their opponents' stands. While this was difficult if the opponents waffled on the issue or if there were few differences between the side taking the initiative and the opposition, it could be done. Those shifting their positions risked accusations of waffling, which could make character an issue. In districts where candidates tried to make it an issue but failed, explanations for the its failure to catch on differed. Some felt that it was because the candidate did not emphasize the issue enough or gave too many messages to the voters. One New Jersey Republican, referring to the better financed Democratic opponents, explained:

> *They threw everything and anything at us [in one district],... everything from hurting senior citizens, to abortion, to crime, to the environment.... They had a different issue every week.... [In many targeted districts] it seemed like they had four or five issues in each race that they tried to play. They had a lot of money.... But I don't think it was effective in dislodging incumbents.*

### Media Attention

In both states, most candidates reported that the media had given a lot of attention to the issue in the campaign season (63% in Virginia and 86% in New Jersey). For several different reasons, candidates saw this as making the issue important in their races. For some, the media coverage helped inform voters about candidates' stands on the issue; a few saw themselves as probably getting more coverage than they otherwise would have. But this was not true for everyone. Only about 12% of the Virginia candidates and 45% of New Jersey candidates mentioned that the media gave a lot of attention to the issue specifically in their legislative races.

Yet some pro-choicers said they benefitted from attention to the issue because it primed the voters for their campaign literature, even if it did not provide the voters with information that would enable them to connect their issue concerns with support for particular candidates. Some of the general coverage focused on the issue at a national level — featuring, for example, actions in Congress or protests. Especially in Virginia, many thought the gubernatorial race was a principal focus of the coverage and a force driving the electoral interest in the issue. As this Virginia candidate explained:

> *Even with* Webster, *it was fairly dormant until it was exacerbated by the major media blitz by a statewide candidate who had the resources to really pour it in. Then it was like a feeding frenzy where the rest of the media picked up on it and...then it became an issue that you had to deal with.*

Distinguishing between the impact of media coverage of the gubernatorial race and the events of the campaign itself is often difficult at best, but many candidates saw the abortion issue in the gubernatorial race as another factor affecting the importance of the issue in their own legislative races. This leaves the impression that, had this not been an issue at the top of the ticket, it would have been much less of an issue further down the ticket.

### The Gubernatorial Race

Legislative candidates were more likely to see the issue as important in the gubernatorial election than in their own races. About seven out of ten in New Jersey saw it as an important factor in the governor's race, as did more than four out of five in Virginia. Many who saw the issue as important in their own races attributed part of its importance to what was happening at the top of the ticket — and some of those effects were not necessarily issue-based. Those who thought the issue at the gubernatorial level influenced legislative elections gave three different types of reasons: 1) The gubernatorial candidates' substantive position or handling of the issue drove voters away from the Republican party line and toward the Democratic party on election day; 2) The importance of the issue in the high profile gubernatorial races raised a divisive issue that voters would not have thought about otherwise at the state legislative level; and 3) Voter association of Republicans with the pro-life position and Democrats with the pro-choice position (correctly or incorrectly) meant that some legislative candidates gained votes and others lost.

***The Impact of Substance and Style on Support for the Ticket.*** Democrats in both states were fairly satisfied with the way their gubernatorial candidates handled the issue, in terms of both substance and style. The emphasis that Wilder placed on this issue as a matter of individual freedom seemed especially laudable to some Democrats we interviewed. Most Democrats saw no detrimental effects from the treatment of the issue at the top of the ticket. However, in both states the pro-choice Democrats saw the gubernatorial coattails from the issue as short. Typically, New Jersey Democratic assembly candidates saw style as being at least as important as content:

> *Mr. Courter, sort of was wishy-washy. First he made the statement then he changed the statement. And I don't think it was the issue so much as the image. Because I've heard a lot of people say, "What kind of person is he? He keeps changing his position." And I think it was the image of not standing for what you believe in more than what the issue was that probably damaged Jim Courter. Congressman Florio made his position very clear right from the onset and never changed it. Now whether that was all that important to the people or not, I don't know. But I think the perception that this is what I stand for and I'm not going to change probably meant more in their view of the candidates than the issue itself.*

Virginia Democrats placed more emphasis on the framing of the issue:

> *I thought the way he [Wilder] handled it, it became a more conservative issue. The government interference aspect of it. I'm sure that had some effect just because it wasn't these wild radical women marching for their rights or whatever.... I think there are a number of women who would vote that way and think that way, but they don't want to be open about it.*

Republicans in both states saw more detrimental effects from their ticket leaders' handling of the issue. Republicans were often highly critical of the candidates at the top of their tickets.[3] Perhaps the area where there was the greatest unanimity in perspective about the impact of the abortion issue was northern Virginia. There, Republicans, regardless of whether they were pro-choice, pro-life, or in-between,

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[3]This was the case even though Virginia Republicans fared better in contested districts than in any other election during the 20th century and only two incumbent Republican delegates were defeated compared to four Democratic incumbents. (See Larry Sabato, "Virginia's National Election for Governor — 1989", University of Virginia, 1989.)

frequently thought that they had been disadvantaged by Coleman's handling of the abortion issue and, in some cases, by the emergence of this issue. The Coleman campaign was obviously aware of the strained relations, as one Coleman activist observed:

> *In northern Virginia, I think it's a whole different ball game [than downstate]. The legislative candidates up there by and large — I'm not sure they ran away from us but they certainly didn't run with us. And they felt that we were not being helpful to them.*

One Republican party activist was a little more blunt:

> *The abortion issue was one of [the important issues] in a lot of races.... The challenge [the Republican candidates in northern Virginia] faced was to set themselves apart without trashing Marshall Coleman.*

The substantive problems presented by Coleman's handling of the issue were mentioned by three times as many candidates from northern Virginia as from the rest of the state. An incumbent Republican delegate from northern Virginia echoed this finding:

> *Was it an issue? You bet it was! And the people running for House of Delegates that didn't know how to handle it got all wrapped up on that thing and were in a defensive mode all the way through it. Our state ticket on the Republican side, as a Republican legislator, gave me a major head wind.... In the last week of August, Marshall Coleman in my legislative district, which is [strongly] Republican,...was leading Wilder in the head-to-head question better than two to one and with 30% undecided. And when we re-did the poll on October 1st, he was dead even, with 20% undecided. And what had happened between the last week of August and the first of October was that Wilder came on northern Virginia television with these anti-Marshall abortion ads and Marshall did not counter with them until the first week in October and then he handled it badly. And I felt that was one of the major contributors right there, and you could see it markedly in a period of thirty days in the polls.... Where was the major loss in the voter support between the third week of August and the first week of October? It was...people that characterized themselves as moderate voters. Coleman lost 26% of that vote in my district in that short period primarily because of the abortion issue. The second issue was [that] he [Coleman] was*

> *attacking so hard that the attacks on other issues were turning voters off in my area, who are highly educated people and would prefer to see politicians, local or state, to run and present...issues.*

Indeed, one pro-life leaning Republican candidate from northern Virginia saw this issue in the gubernatorial race as a principal reason that he lost the race and appeared to place less emphasis on his own position:

> *In fact, if the polling data was correct,...in September I was winning...by 10 points. Coleman was winning in my district by 15 points. We then took a poll one month later, [and] my opponent and I were even, and Coleman had dropped essentially a 25-point flip.... It was clear what was happening.... It [abortion] was a cutting edge issue which I knew was unpopular in the district, and the top of the ticket was defining it.... We were losing and clearly couldn't control it anymore.... I can knock on doors and win like three votes in an hour. That's a lot of work. Coleman can lose me 1,000 votes in the same amount of time.*

When asked whether it would have helped if his own position had been different, he replied:

> *The only thing differently that I could have done was to flip-flop, and...I think it wouldn't have been politically effective even if I had.... I don't think it would have made enough of a difference, because of the tidal wave that was going on at the top.*

Others who thought the issue affected the Virginia race cited style rather than, or in addition to, content. As this pro-life endorsed Republican from western Virginia observed:

> *In the governor's race, the abortion issue did play a part...based probably on how the issue was handled. For six weeks Wilder was able to hammer at Coleman, unanswered, that Coleman was an extremist, he wanted to put women back in the dark ages, etcetera, etcetera. It was never answered. If Coleman had come back on the attack and said no, I'm only talking about two percent of the abortions, Wilder is the extremist because he wants every child killed for sex selection, for convenience sake...he could have nullified the issue and he could have, would have, probably won the election.*

Style was also a concern among some New Jersey Republicans, who saw Courter's handling of the issue as hurting their legislative campaigns.

> *Jim Courter was just terrible. He, as much as I wanted him to win, he wasn't sure of himself. He wasn't sure what to say and he wasn't ready to go on for governor. He was simply bowled over by the task.... He didn't get the pro-life vote because he wasn't pro-life. At the end of the race I didn't know what he was. He was mealy-mouthed about the whole thing. That's what cost Mr. Courter a lot of votes.... [If] he had come out and said I'm pro-life and that's the way it is, would he have won? No, he wouldn't have won. He would not have won because he was damaged on three or four other issues. Homosexuals can't be teachers. Nobody thinks like that. You can go down to...a local Klan meeting and they don't think that way. Nobody thinks that homosexuals can't be school teachers. And that's what he said. And they played that on the news. And my brother-in-law is a boiler maker and he's not a political scientist or anything. He calls me up and tells me you have to watch the news tonight, it's really hilarious. They show him saying it. They show him saying that he didn't say it. I mean, how could you possibly be taken as a serious candidate? So, as far as the abortion issue is concerned, I don't think that was the major [issue]. It was a contributing factor. But I think Jim Courter probably would have done better if he made his position clear that he was pro-life.* (Pro-life Republican)

Other Republican assembly candidates, however, thought substance rather than purely style was important:

> *I think [the Courter campaign] had a devastating effect on our campaign.... Congressman Courter lost his campaign way back in the summer before it even started. And the major issue that...started the momentum going downhill for him was the abortion issue. And the stand...was so far removed from the mainstream thinking of the people of New Jersey and the country, and anyone who espouses just a measure of freedom or concern over basic constitutional rights...were absolutely turned off by the stand that his people were giving him and his entire voting record on this, and that started the ball rolling.* (Pro-choice Republican)

> *Courter had a lot of problems. He was his own worst enemy and he became the assembly candidate's worst enemy. But just on philosophy and political ideals, he was absolutely too conservative for the people.* (Pro-choice Republican)

One New Jersey Republican activist concurred about the broad effect on assembly candidates of Courter's problems:

> *Jim Florio...was able to put Jim Courter on the defense a couple of weeks after the primary. He was able to teach us that we were going to be badly out-spent at the legislative level long before Labor Day, which is a rare bit of information to have. It's a bad bit of information to have, and* Webster *was one part of that.... [This along with some other issues] kept them from raising money, and when we sat down to map out our major strategic assumptions [for the assembly campaigns] at the end of the summer, we said we were going to be out-spent.... And I think* Webster *helped create the environment in which this chain reaction started that led us to that conclusion. We also planned, since we were going to be out-spent, to go dark for about three weeks.... And we tried to time that [with] when we anticipated a Courter burst would occur.... We can afford to be dark, not hitting the mailboxes, or local radio stations with our media, because we'll be getting a generic Republican boost through the gubernatorial candidacy. And then we'll come back in, we'll have enough resources to close strong.*

But the Courter surge never occurred and the Republicans lost their slim majority hold on the General Assembly.

***Raising a Divisive Issue for Republicans.*** In both states, Democrats were more likely than Republicans to want the abortion issue to become important in their races. This is partly because the issue is more divisive among Republican voters than among Democrats, as was shown in the previous chapters. The spotlight on the issue in the high-profile gubernatorial elections forced some candidates to address the issue, whether they wanted to or not. As one Virginia Democratic candidate observed:

> *It [abortion] became a strong issue that fed the public curiosity...about where do you stand.... It was brought to the fore of the public mind by the state races.*

This was particularly troubling for Virginia Republican candidates because their party base is an uneasy alliance between traditional Republicans and the New Right, between those emphasizing economic conservatism and those choosing the party for its conservative stands on social issues. The problem this poses for Republicans was described by a GOP candidate who lost his election bid:

> *I was probably asked about...[the abortion issue]...when I went door-to-door more than anything else. And it was not uncommon to knock on one person's door, and their position would be pro-choice...and you could knock on the next-door neighbor's door and their view would be entirely different. You could go across the street and there would be another view.*

At the same time, this was not an issue that many pro-choice Virginia Republicans wanted to deal with. One pro-choice Republican, who faced a pro-life Democrat, explained, "I did not bring it up except to the group that was supporting pro-choice."

Other Republicans who defined themselves as pro-choice found themselves in the difficult position of trying to avoid alienating pro-life Republicans while defending themselves against opponents' charges of being pro-life. As one Republican recounted:

> *Well, politically speaking [the abortion issue] did present a whale of a challenge.... Toward the end of the campaign, I sent a postcard to all registered women who had not voted in the Republican primary, telling them what my position was. It was just a handwritten postcard saying that I am supportive of a woman's right to choose and I will work to protect it.*

***The Impact of the Gubernatorial Race on Party Stereotypes.*** The attention to the issue in the gubernatorial campaign seemed to place pro-choice Republicans in northern Virginia in a no-win situation: Tell the world you're pro-choice, and face potential erosion of your Republican base, or keep your pro-choice views to yourself, and face the prospect of being connected with an unpopular position at the top of the ticket. Six of 23 Virginia Republicans and four of the 21 New Jersey GOP legislative candidates we interviewed thought the pro-life position had become too tied to the Republican party; the Virginia Republicans were more likely to see the gubernatorial race as reinforcing these stereotypes.

One northern Virginia pro-choice Republican who faced a pro-choice Democrat was the only legislative candidate interviewed who literally sustained an injury due to his party affiliation. His story clearly illustrated that, at least in the minds of some voters, pro-life and Republican are starting to become synonymous:

> *On election day, a woman hit me with an umbrella! She came up and hit me — "How can you wear that [I'm pro-choice and Republican button]? You are a Republican!" I said, "Yes, but I'm pro-choice." She said, "You can't be. All of you are alike!"... They were angry here.*

Falling short of bodily injury, others had similar experiences:

> *I was shaking hands and this lady came up to me and she wagged her finger at me and she said, "We can't trust you Republicans." I said, "On what?" "On abortion." I said, "Do you know my position on abortion?" She said, "No."*

To some extent, party stereotypes were less of a problem for pro-life Democratic candidates. One New Jersey candidate saw being pro-life and a Democrat as perhaps the best of both worlds in 1989. As he put it:

> *The reason why I think we won by 19,000 votes, was that we were getting benefits from both sides. So I think we were getting a lot of pro-choice [support] because we were Democrats and again, pro-life was taking their stance.*

But things weren't always rosy for pro-life Democrats. Some pro-life endorsed Democrats found themselves the victims of public misperceptions, and even found themselves being picketed by pro-lifers who had endorsed them. As one *pro-life* Democrat explained:

> *On the day [of]...a rally uptown in Trenton for those who supported abortion, pro-life people picketed our headquarters.... When I went outside to ask why, they said, well, because your name is linked with Jim Florio's. And I thought that was kind of, kind of misdirected and misguided, [and] subsequently received some apologies for that from others, but I thought that was kind of unique.*

A Virginia delegate candidate was concerned that pro-lifers had not been mobilized for him because they simply assumed that since he was a Democrat, he had to be pro-choice:

> *This was a Catholic church. I talked to the priest personally. In fact, I'm Catholic. And he said, "You know, I'm going to have all our people campaign against you because of your views on*

*abortion"...because, see, I was running on the Democratic ticket.... So I let him talk, talk himself out, plus about four or five other people. So I handed them my position here and I handed them also the position of the incumbent who was just 100% pro-choice, pro-abortion, all the way, no restrictions. So I said, "You're going to vote for him now, because you aren't going to vote for me." That's my point about who knows the issues. Here is a very vocal...group on the issue and didn't even know what the candidate stood for on the issue. And this was three days prior to the election.*

## Issue Group Activity

One of the big questions in the summer of 1989 was whether the pro-choice activists could organize in time to be a factor in the election, as the pro-life groups had always been thought to be. Getting involved in the elections would help keep this issue in front of the public, contribute toward electing sympathetic legislative candidates, and strengthen post-election ties as sympathetic legislators acknowledged tangible support from groups.

Many of these legislators did receive campaign assistance from the groups. However, in both states, pro-choice endorsed candidates reported assistance more frequently than the pro-life endorsed candidates, and they were also more likely to see their endorsement as having an impact. Furthermore, the positive impact of the *Webster* decision on campaign resources — such as volunteers and contributions — was mentioned almost exclusively by pro-choice endorsed candidates. While a number saw these issue groups as helpful, no one saw their allies as bearing the sole responsibility or the sole credit for the issue being on the agenda. As one pro-choice legislator remarked about the pro-choice groups:

*I don't think they made the issue. I think they worked the issue very well but they didn't make the issue.*

***Pro-Choice Activity.*** About half of the New Jersey legislators and about one-third of the Virginia legislators interviewed had been endorsed by the pro-choice groups.[4] Among these pro-choice endorsed candidates, four out of ten New Jersey candidates thought their pro-choice endorsement was helpful. Another four out of ten were positive overall about the assistance, but had some reservations, suggesting a perspective of "more helpful than harmful." The remainder saw no effect from their

[4]To reiterate, these candidates interviewed were from districts where the abortion issue seemed likely to be an issue.

endorsement. Virginia legislative candidates were a bit less enthusiastic about their endorsements' effects. About one-fourth saw the groups as very helpful and about half of the Virginia pro-choice endorsees saw their endorsements as more helpful than harmful, with the remainder seeing no effects.

The most frequently mentioned ways in which the pro-choice groups had helped were through contributions, phone bank assistance, and provision of volunteers directly or indirectly (through independent campaign efforts). Over half of the New Jersey pro-choice endorsed candidates mentioned each of these and about one-third of the Virginia pro-choice candidates did so as well.

Roughly one-third of New Jersey pro-choice endorsed candidates and half of their Virginia counterparts said *Webster* affected their volunteer supply. This view was more frequently expressed by Democrats. One pro-choice Democratic challenger, who lost the race, described the benefits that *Webster* brought to his campaign organization:

> *One day...there were eight or nine women stuffing envelopes in my parents' house, and I went around and asked how each one of them got involved in the campaign. Two-thirds got involved on the abortion issue and every single person there was Republican. That was when we knew we were getting our word out and that there was real potential.*

While it was still up to the candidates to make it an issue in the campaign, the bi-partisan interest groups could use some strategies that Democratic or Republican candidates might not be encouraged by their parties to use. As one Democrat explained:

> *I'm a politician. I've got to handle the Democratic [party] politician. That means you don't touch Republicans, you let the Republicans stay home. You hope it's going to rain on their side of the street unless you know they're an independent.... [Pro-choice activists] felt that [in] this district...there were Republican women who would vote for a candidate who might be a Democrat but they wouldn't hold that against the person because the choice issue was more important.... This created a little bit of a problem for our Democratic leadership who said, "We don't want you bringing out Republicans. First of all, we don't know that they said they were going to vote for [you], and how do we know that even if they do vote for [you], how do we know they won't vote for Jim Courter? How do we know that they won't vote for the Republican freeholders," and, frankly, I did agree with that. That was an effort that...we were not privy to what they did,*

*how they [pro-choice activists] did it, or what.... On the other hand, by the numbers, something brought out Republican people to vote for us.*

While the pro-choice legislators were appreciative of issue activists' help (and some were quite surprised at the pro-choicers' degree of organization), these legislative candidates were not unanimous in their kudos. Some thought that the groups had tried to help, but had been ineffective.

*They could have been more organized. I think that they could have had their group focusing within the towns and being on the telephone and going door-to-door, and working at it. They didn't work at it.... It could have been letter writing. It could have been more letter writing to the local newspapers, letting the newspapers know that this was an issue, that this was a concern of the residents of the respective towns. They didn't do that. Except for one publication, maybe two in the district, there were no letters to the editor.*

One of the greatest concerns was with the phone banks' effectiveness in accomplishing their *electoral* goals:

*When they sat down to talk, they talked about the pro-choice issue. They did not talk about how do we get [me] elected. They should have had a more direct campaign on getting their candidates elected, not their [pro-choice] message across.... Because it is not the person that they were calling that was going to vote on their issue. It is the candidate who wins that will be voting on their issue.*

Another concern was that the groups did not coordinate their efforts adequately with the candidates:

*I was told that I was going to get the money and I never did. [I wish they had] given me money. I didn't need them on a telephone bank.*

*I think it would have been better had we helped pick out where they did [leafletting].... And where they did...was...a precinct where you wouldn't try to get out the vote necessarily. So it probably would have been much more beneficial in places where there were more younger people.*

A final complaint was about partisanship within the pro-choice groups. This was more prevalent in Virginia than in New Jersey. This criticism came largely from Virginia Republicans who were not endorsed. Some thought that the pro-choice groups had been very unfair in endorsing their Democratic, pro-choice (usually incumbent) opponents, rather than endorsing both candidates. As one pro-choice Republican noted:

> *NARAL had a rally here in Market Square in front of City Hall. They had a big stage, huge PA system, and they had all kinds of people and television and this, that, and the other. Nothing but Democratic candidates — not a Republican.... And it got to be a "Beat Coleman, beat Coleman, beat Coleman" thing. That upset me a little bit.*

Another Virginia Republican (who was not pro-choice) observed:

> *I consider the pro-choice groups a wing of the Democratic party.... If they came to me and said, "We'd like to help one of your pro-choice candidates," I'd trust them as far as I could throw a VW bus.... It really irritated me that two places where we did nominate pro-choice candidates were two places that the pro-choice people very actively got involved against our pro-choice candidates.*

The pro-choice groups in Virginia see things very differently than do the Virginia Republicans. One pro-choice activist defended her organization:

> *Unfortunately the hard Right has captured the Republican party in Virginia and has made it very dangerous to be a pro-choice Republican.... I find it, as a former Republican myself, very unfortunate that the hard Right has captured the Republican party in Virginia to the extent it has.... A moderate Republican is an endangered species. And when we find them we support them.*

Partisanship on the part of the pro-choice activists was less commonly expressed in New Jersey, but one pro-choice Republican party activist in New Jersey expressed similar sentiments:[5]

> *A lot of the membership of the pro-choice groups, NARAL and NOW, were...activists within the Democrat party. Given that, I think it was hard for them to separate their want of having Democrats win...versus the abortion issue.... The people who favored choice were tilted in the Democrat area if only because that's where their frame of reference was.... From that standpoint it was a disadvantage for Republicans.*

***Pro-Life Activity.*** The greatest surprise was that the pro-life endorsed legislative candidates in these two states were less likely to see benefits from their endorsements than were the pro-choice candidates. About half of pro-life endorsed candidates interviewed in each state said there was no effect from their endorsement. Others saw them as a source of volunteers and as helpful in spreading the word, although pro-life endorsed candidates mentioned fewer ways the groups helped and were less likely to say they received assistance than were the pro-choice endorsed candidates. Particularly in Virginia, when they did help, they did so in a relatively low profile manner:

> *They [pro-life groups] weren't so active that you saw them on the nightly news. They wrote letters and did things discreetly. Quite honestly, I think the groups, both pro-life and pro-choice, feel so strongly about the information that they won't leak the information so much.*

In addition, some candidates in both states mentioned literature drops at churches on the Sunday before the election. This New Jersey candidate, who was among those most helped by pro-lifers, explained:

> *The pro-life people were very slow starting. The pro-choice people are much more active. And I think it probably became apparent to them*

[5]In New Jersey, 67% of the legislators endorsed by the pro-life PAC and 25% of the legislators endorsed by pro-choice groups were Republicans; 33% of pro-life endorsed candidates and 75% of pro-choice candidates were Democrats. In Virginia, most pro-life endorsed candidates who faced general election competition were Republican and most pro-choice endorsed candidates with general election opponents were Democrats.

*that there was substantial activity. So their endorsement was helpful, I think in some of the churches — Catholic and Lutheran and the other Christian denominations — that support pro-life, there was probably a little more activity than there would normally be.... I don't know that any of them ever mentioned candidates by name.... There were literature drops. And I think that the Catholic bishop's...position was known amongst his parishioners. And I think this was true of some of the Lutheran churches.... But I think that they became, near the end, a little more vocal.... The pro-life groups...helped us, they supported us. Not so much in financial help. I don't know if they really have that much money. But they were helpful. They gave us volunteers.... I guess if I were to take all the volunteer groups, they were probably 10 percent [of my volunteers].*

Indeed, the most formidable power that these pro-life endorsements carried with them was the possibility that the churches might target the pro-choice opponents. In New Jersey, such statements were more likely to come from Catholic clergy and in Virginia, from conservative Protestant clergy:

*For the most part, the churches stayed away. There was one church in my district, that on the Sunday before the election on Tuesday, handed out a leaflet...ostensibly...to notify them...they should follow their conscience and they should vote for whichever candidate opposed abortion.... I saw it and I said, jeepers, this is not separating the church and the state here.... And this was a Baptist church, I believe.... I thought that took a lot of audacity to pass that thing out in church, a leaflet.... That was the only church I know of that did that, and maybe something was said from the pulpit and I would never have known about that.* (Virginia pro-choice candidate)

One candidate was quite surprised to find himself the implicit target of his own priest:

*They were preaching from the pulpit on this question during the month of October in the Catholic church, in my church.... They weren't denouncing me by name. They weren't saying "[this candidate] is pro-choice so don't vote for him." But they were saying quite clearly (and this is from the pulpit)...that there are candidates who are this way and there are candidates who are that way. If you want to know who they are, we'll provide information on those candidates.* (New Jersey pro-choice candidate)

As with some pro-choice candidates, some pro-life candidates had similar complaints about the way their issue group supporters provided their assistance:

> *They [pro-life activists] provided a hand-out which was my answers to a lengthy questionnaire. But my name is absolutely lost in the literature.... It was a very confusing piece of literature.... So that piece of literature, I thought, which was their main help was not really a great help.*

> *If I could have given it [the pro-life endorsement] back, I would have. Kind of like when Ronald Reagan got the KKK endorsement. Thank you but no thanks. I don't want it. It was not planned and wasn't exactly something I cherished. I didn't even know I had it.... They didn't even send money.... They didn't do diddley. That's why...I kept looking at my opponent and said, "My God, look at the pro-choice." At least we know which side pays off the best. I mean he was getting like $500, $1,000...he was getting money from pro-choicers and I got nothing.*

The most frequent criticism of the pro-life groups by sympathizers occurred in Virginia and centered around their requirement that candidates support the Human Life Amendment to obtain the endorsement of the group. The New Jersey pro-life PAC was not criticized for being too stringent, and indeed seemed less rigorous in its criteria for endorsements. In fact, candidates were more likely to comment on their discomfort with NOW's pledge cards as a way of gaining their allegiance.[6] Such reports seem to indicate that, regardless of orientation on the issue, the perceived use of ultimatums like the pledge cards and the Human Life Amendment, may be less successful than intended for developing a candidate's future support.

[6]New Jersey NOW sent letters to legislative candidates asking them to pledge they would never vote to restrict women's access to abortion. They requested that the pledge be notarized and returned in order to be considered for endorsements, provoking a firestorm of debate.

## BUILDING BRIDGES FOR THE FUTURE: ATTITUDES TOWARD ISSUE GROUP ENDORSEMENTS

While candidates often saw the groups as playing a role in making the issue salient to the voters (although by no means the role that the groups ascribed to themselves), legislative candidates were not unanimous in wanting their endorsements. As one Virginia candidate explained, "Each group brings some baggage." About one out of every four Virginia candidates volunteered that they would not want an endorsement from either group. This was rare in New Jersey, where candidates were more willing than their Virginia counterparts to be endorsed by either a pro-choice or a pro-life group.[7]

The groups were obviously aware of the way they were viewed by the candidates. In New Jersey endorsements were more willingly accepted and were published far and wide in the newspapers by the groups. In contrast, the endorsement processes of the Virginia groups was much more discreet. The Virginia endorsements were circulated with little fanfare (especially pro-life endorsements and, outside of northern Virginia, the pro-choice endorsements) within respective group networks. As one pro-life activist explained:

> *We endorsed a number of candidates for the legislative races.... We don't endorse generally publicly to the media.... We publish the endorsements in our newsletter to our membership so that they know who the solid pro-life people are. But it's generally left up to the candidate to use the endorsement[s] as they see fit.*

Such caution also characterized pro-choice candidates in Virginia, especially downstate. Two pro-choice endorsed candidates explained:

> *I think pro-life people are probably viewed to some extent the same way pro-choice groups are. A little bit on the radical fringe. Those are the kind of people you want to stay away from.... They wanted to help with polls and my decision was, thanks, but I don't want to alienate people.... They have a clear choice between me and my*

[7]This could be attributed to differences in the populations surveyed in the two states. More of the New Jersey districts' assembly members were endorsed by these groups. However, this pattern of Virginians being more leery of groups held even among endorsed candidates and among a few who seemed to have qualified for endorsements but may have discouraged them.

*opponent and I didn't think that there was anything further to be gained.*

*They [NARAL] offered to make some telephone calls on a national level.... They would have called let's say from Washington, D.C.... Given the conservative nature of my constituents,...I felt that [it] might be better done...locally than to have someone on a national level who the folks didn't know making telephone calls.... Plus, I would have had to have reported it as an in-kind contribution. And I didn't really wish to do that.*

Indeed, the process was so discreet that several of the opponents of endorsed Virginia candidates (both those endorsed by pro-choice and those endorsed by the pro-life groups) were unaware that their opponents had been endorsed. While this avoided making the endorsement a lightning rod and was appreciated by candidates in this more conservative state, it also meant that the groups' messages were circulated to only a limited number of people.

In contrast, the New Jersey pro-life activists saw the media use of endorsement press releases as a mechanism for getting their message to the public. While free media coverage was no doubt advantageous in communicating with larger numbers of voters, there was also a down side. In the wake of the pro-choice resurgence, six pro-life endorsed legislative candidates renounced their public endorsements by the New Jersey Pro-Life PAC.

Many legislative candidates seemed concerned about the potential for groups on either side of the issue to be viewed as extremist. The way the abortion issue was framed affected their comfort in dealing with the issue. In particular, framing and the apparent mobilization of pro-choice support in 1989 appeared to aid pro-choice groups' future relationships with legislators. Many pro-choice legislative candidates seemed much more comfortable with talking about their views regarding the role of government than in talking about the choices individuals might make in exercising a "right to choose"; Conversely, pro-life candidates seemed more reluctant to talk about restricting personal freedom than to talk about the particular instances where abortion is chosen. This seemed particularly true in Virginia, where the framing of abortion as an issue of individual freedom rather than women's rights seemed to make legislative candidates more comfortable with a pro-choice stand:

*By being pro-choice you don't have to be pro-abortion.... That choice can encompass people of a wide range of opinion who suggest that the decision making ought to be back at the individual level, not the government level. Don't get caught up in the extremism.... I think you*

*have to kind of wrap yourself in the freedoms of America, the freedoms to choose, and let that be kind of the basic freedom and not extreme.*

In both states, the pro-choice groups saw themselves as being more accepted by the legislators than in previous years. In New Jersey, some reported that candidates actually sought their endorsements and that seven to ten pro-life or pro-life leaning legislators switched over to their side following *Webster*. As one pro-choice activist explained:

*We've been sending out questionnaires forever. The number we get back has increased every year. The candidates are more likely to say where they are this year, especially those who were pro-choice. They were more willing to say, yes, I'm pro-choice. [One legislator] has had an anti-choice vote [record] going back for years...so in the past elections I've listed him as anti-abortion. He never answered my questionnaire. This year he answered the questionnaire pro-choice. So I listed him as pro-choice, but I didn't endorse him.... I got a call from his wife. "How come you're not endorsing my husband?" And I said, "He's been right-to-life every year but this one. How can I endorse him?" And she said, "Well, he's changed, he's totally pro-choice now. I've been working on him." ...So I said, "Well, let him call me and I'll discuss it with him." The Right-to-Life came out with their list of endorsements and he was on their endorsement list. And they were going on his old record. He had not answered their questionnaire this time, but he had answered mine as pro-choice. So I talked to [him] and he told me how [his wife] had changed his mind and I said..."You can't lose, you've got no opposition to speak of, you know, nobody knows the name of the guy that's running against you, you cannot lose. However, if you feel it would help you clear up your image and clear up any doubts about where you stand on the issue, I'll endorse you." And he said, yes.*

In Virginia, one pro-choicer seemed pleased that legislators would associate with issue activists in public:

*Our friends, who in the past would maybe be supportive behind closed doors but didn't want to be so up front...felt like they could even come up to us in elevators, even if the rooms were crowded and the elevators were crowded and strike up a conversation. They were more comfortable. And I think part of that has to do with the way that Wilder was able to frame the issue. He wrapped himself in the American flag.*

One interesting difference between the states was that the Virginia pro-choice activists seemed less aware of potential new allies than their New Jersey counterparts. These potential allies, who might have appeared pro-life leaning previously but came out in support of keeping state laws as they are showed a pro-choice bent that might be helpful in future coalition building. This could be the product of the more leery approach toward these groups by Virginia lawmakers which seems to result in less communication between activists and legislators.

While some legislators dubbed the pro-choice groups extremists, there was rarely any indication that they had alienated candidates by their actions. Pro-life activists, in their zeal to accomplish their goals, seemed to alienate a number of legislators — legislators they might need in order to further legislative agendas aimed at parental consent, notification, and similar measures. As one legislator explained:

> *[Pro-choice] groups seem to take a softer line and not any of this calling somebody a murderer or telling them that they're not a Christian or those kinds of hurtful things that the other side seems to do.... Probably eight miles from where I live, there is a Baptist church that wrote me a letter and said they were sorry that I was a Southern Baptist because they thought it was too bad that anybody with my views would profess to be a Baptist.*

A Republican party activist described an encounter with one pro-lifer whose approach did not bode well for building bridges:

> *Personally I was turned off by the woman who came up to shake my hand and...had to shift hands because she holds a plastic fetus in her hand and she's obviously pro-life and was going to chat with me about that whole issue.... It's her right to do it. I just don't think that it's appropriate.*

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE EMERGENCE OF THE ABORTION ISSUE FOR PARTY HARMONY: PRO-CHOICE REPUBLICANS AND PRO-LIFE DEMOCRATS

### Pro-Choice Republicans

The discussions with Republicans, and particularly pro-choice Republicans, presented a mixed picture of their relationship with their party organizations. Most of the candidates in both states did not volunteer that they had a problem with their party on this issue. However, some did have problems with their party. This was particularly true in Virginia, where 25% of the Republicans (all from the northern part of the state and fully 60% of northern Virginia Republicans interviewed) expressed concern that the pro-life position was becoming too identified with their party. There was a feeling among some, although not all, who were not pro-life that they were not accepted by their party. One pro-choice Republican recalled his feeling of exclusion from his party:

> *I was asked by the city committee to give an overview of the campaign.... I got up and I reiterated the lack of support.... I felt it was unfortunate, that it really required some fairness.... People wrote a letter to the committee chairman stating that this had to stop.... I was just saying there had got to be room for both sides and the party shouldn't be skewed on this thing.... Let's not take the party down the path to the point that we're all labeled.*

As one in-between GOP candidate explained:

> *Well, let's put it this way. I felt as if the telephone lines were cut to Richmond. They did not want to hear from me. When Eddy Dalton [Republican candidate for lieutenant governor] would come up or when Phil Benedetti [Republican candidate for attorney general] would come up, and we would meet at gatherings, I would take them over to the pro-choice people and say, "Listen to these people. You're only listening to one side and there is another side to hear and you really ought to listen to it." And eventually they just got tired of me doing that.*

While it may seem easy to say that everyone should respect others' sincerity on this issue, the conflict runs very deep. The principles which motivate each side are difficult to compromise, because the two sides simply see the world very differently. Pro-choice Republican candidates in both states seemed more willing to

co-exist with pro-life Republicans under the "big tent" than pro-lifers were to accept pro-choicers. Many pro-life Republicans' views on what they see as a moral issue make it difficult (if not almost impossible) to "agree to disagree." As one-pro-life candidate explained:

> *The political pundits...have a problem because they say...the Republican party is going to have to begin to compromise on this particular issue [abortion]. It's not like capital gains where we can talk about whether it's a good idea or if it's not a great idea, maybe, you know, 5% or 10% or whatever. There's not really room for compromise on this issue from the perspective that if you approach it from...a principled position, it is or it is not a human life. And if it is a human life, then, and you believe that, then I don't think you have any choice but to protect it and to give it the protections under the Constitution afforded everybody else.*

Had *Webster* never happened and had the status quo remained pro-choice, the "big tent" notion might well have been more feasible. But the rift between conservatives and moderates in the Republican party of Virginia (as in many other states) runs deep, as reflected in the comments of this Republican:

> *I was challenged in the primary not because of my abortion issue stance.... The excuse given anyway, was that I voted for a local income tax referendum.... But the hidden agenda was that here is a liberal pinko Communist who calls himself a Republican,...has the record of being pro-choice and pro-Equal Rights Amendment and he's a school teacher and no telling what else he's for.... What we need to do is to defeat him and then the conservatives can use that...defeat as a signal to other pinko Communist moderate Republicans, that there is no place in the party for them.*

New Jersey Republicans raised concerns about the issue becoming too party-related somewhat less often, and when they did, their concerns were expressed less intensely than their Virginia counterparts. The New Jersey Republican party has had a long tradition of moderate Republicanism, and this is reflected in the apparent ability of pro-choice and pro-life Republican activists to coexist within the same party more peacefully. A New Jersey Republican party activist's comments may help explain this interstate difference:

> *What we have said in our platform was our party is big enough for all views, and we said we are not a party to really impose our views*

*on that particular issue [the abortion issue].... There is room for pro-life Republicans; there is room for pro-choice Republicans. We're all Republicans.... It [refusing to take a position in the platform] wasn't ducking the issue; it was saying we're not going to take a position because we have room enough for everybody. In New Jersey, it's working. We are not tearing ourselves apart over that issue at all. We may have our own family squabbles over issues, but not about abortion.... To the vast majority of people, it is just not the number one issue. People in New Jersey, especially, are being very respectful of how you feel. People know that I happen to be pro-choice. But we may have a conversation for fifteen or twenty minutes, and then someone will say, "Well, I don't agree with you, because I'm pro-life, but I understand that you can feel the way you do."*

However, New Jersey's multi-member legislative districts can result in pro-life and pro-choice Republicans (or Democrats) as running mates on the same ticket. This can strain even the most tolerant relationships when people care deeply about the issue and when it is salient. In some cases it was no problem, but in other cases — particularly in cases involving running mates who were not incumbents with a strong collegial relationship — conflicts emerged. One pro-life Republican challenger who had a pro-choice running mate explained:

*I think it would have been easier if I had a pro-life running mate. It probably would have been easier to get pro-life support and we probably would have made that issue more prominent.... We probably would have lost but I think people would have known where we stood.*

It was still a problem for incumbent running mates who disagreed, and one pair handled it this way:

*I was quite outspoken individually [but] because of my running mate's position on the matter, nowhere did I play up the issue in our joint pieces of literature. It put me at odds with him. I didn't want to put his endorsement by New Jersey Right-to-Life on my literature nor did he want to put my endorsements on the issue on his literature. So we agreed that the issue would not be referred to explicitly. And since we ran a joint campaign, I think we put out four to five pieces of mail, [but] did not address the issue. But we each did our own individual mailings. And I worked with NARAL and NOW...to get help...in terms of mailing lists of people and [I] sent out a letter on my own behalf.*

As in Virginia, New Jersey Republicans (even pro-choicers) did not approach the issue with the same zeal as their Democratic opponents. In addition, some suggested that less favored pro-choice Republicans running with pro-life running mates were discouraged from using the issue for fear that it could harm the chances of the favored candidate. Not surprisingly, Democrats were more willing to talk about conflict among their Republican opponents than their opponents were:

> *[My Republican opponent who had a pro-life running mate] came out very strong and...got the NOW endorsement.... [He] obviously wanted to communicate his position...to the voters. And apparently...his campaign account would not pay for the letter.... I think that the philosophy early on there was that they were just going to save [his pro-life running mate]. My guess is that they might have gotten very scared of the fact that...if it blew up the way they had anticipated and this effort had...stayed strong like it did, that [the pro-choice Republican challenger] might beat out [the pro-life Republican incumbent]...in the elections.*

### Pro-Life Democrats

New Jersey's multi-member system was a challenge for some (although not all) pro-choice and pro-life Democratic pairs — particularly since the issue was potentially salient and seemed an electoral advantage to some pro-choice Democrats. One pro-choice Democrat with a pro-life running mate described the problem:

> *I don't think that [our disagreement] helped the ticket.... There's some people who felt that this was no longer a team. They questioned how [my pro-life running mate] was ever selected...when the gubernatorial candidate was pro-choice, I was pro-choice, the platform was pro-choice.... When I was talking, I had to be careful as to what I said without hanging [my running mate] out to dry on a limb.*

Another Democrat, this one with a pro-life stance, expressed bitterness over activity by pro-choice Democratic women aimed against him and in support of his pro-choice running mate. He questioned whether there was room for pro-life Democrats in the New Jersey party. This Democrat observed:

> *My friend here in town, former Democratic Chairman...was so upset when he saw this [letter from pro-choice Democratic women] come out. And we talked many times about it. He said I think it's time for him and me and some other people to step back and decide whether or not we really do need or want to be part of a Democratic party*

*that structures a litmus test of being pro-choice in order to be a representative or leader of it.*

Another pro-life Democrat, this time from Virginia, saw himself as being perhaps outside of the party, particularly out of favor with women's groups, as he put it:

*Within the women's groups of the Democratic Party,...I wasn't normally loved.*

Other pro-life candidates, however, were much more positive, and saw fewer problems with being a pro-life Democrat. As one New Jersey candidate observed:

*I have always looked at our party, the Democratic party, as an amalgamation of opinion and diverse ideas. And within the legislature, on issues of moral consciousness, we have as a party never really taken a "party position." Everybody's been allowed to deal with moral issues in their own conscience and how they perceive it within themselves. So, really, there was no dilemma.*

When asked what the Democratic party advised pro-life Democrats in New Jersey to do, given that so many of their candidates were using this issue against pro-life Republican opponents, one Democratic activist replied:

*We suggest to the pro-life Democrats that they answer questions on the abortion issue. Don't volunteer the position. We consistently told candidates to be consistent. Stake out your position. Stick to it. Don't expound upon it.... We felt very certain that voters, while their position on this issue was probably more clear than on any other issue you could ask them about, simply don't want to discuss [the issue]. And they don't want the issue, I think for the most part, on the public agenda.*

Thus, while the re-emergence of the abortion issue caused pressure within both parties, the conflict among Democrats seems less severe than among the Republicans.

## THE VOTERS: THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE?

Having seen how legislative candidates dealt with the issue of abortion, we now turn to the voters' responses to the campaigns. To what extent did voters link concern with abortion to voting decisions in these races? In these characteristically low-information races, what did voters actually know about the candidates' positions? If voters did not base their decisions on this issue, was it because they lacked information or because they chose to cast their ballots based on other concerns?

Some (but by no means all) legislative candidates interpret the outcomes of these elections as evidence of the will of the people on this issue. When asked what the people in the district wanted done about the abortion issue, one legislative candidate observed:

> *I really don't know. Obviously,...they're happy with pro-lifers because this would be the third time around that they have elected two pro-lifers.... So I would have to assume that this district is a pro-life district.... I think that the polls might be off because definitely this district, just based on the way they voted, has been...pro-life.*

This section assesses the extent to which legislative elections are actually a reflection of the "will of the people" and the extent to which the potential for this issue to be important was realized in legislative elections in the two states.

Pro-life and pro-choice groups and their supporters have touted election results as evidence of their political clout. When the results can be interpreted in a manner that is favorable, both sides proclaim the results a vindication of the political advantages (or the lack of disadvantage) of their own views and a measure of the public's pulse on the issue. The 1989 elections were no exception.

In New Jersey, pro-life groups interpreted the legislative election results as showing that if you stand firm with a pro-life position, you can win:

> *New Jersey Pro-Life PAC is pleased to report that in the elections held earlier this month, the districts where pro-lifers took an active role in supporting pro-life incumbent legislators, the incumbents successfully fought off well-financed pro-abortion challengers to win re-election.... By returning these pro-life legislators to Trenton, the people of New Jersey have shown that when a pro-life candidate stands firm on all the pro-life principles, they can win.* (New Jersey Pro-Life PAC Press Release, 11/29/89)

The same was true in Virginia, where one pro-life Republican activist gave the following spin to the legislative elections:

> *No strong pro-life incumbents were defeated, while several strong pro-choice incumbents were ousted. A "hard-core" pro-choice abortion stance brought no advantages to the individual and probably hurt his candidacy when paired with someone perceived as less "hard-core"....* *Candidates who were perceived as being "more" pro-life than their opponents won more vacant seats than candidates who were perceived as "more" pro-choice.... Although there are many variables to be considered in any election, it is clear that skillful pro-life candidates are quite electable — even after* Webster. *Carefully wielding a pro-life stance may not only be a benefit, but may be an essential key to winning in some Virginia contests.* ("A Preliminary Analysis of House Delegates Races: Can a Pro-life Candidate Win After *Webster*?" Capitol Radio Commentaries)

Similarly, New Jersey pro-choice groups advanced the idea that the pro-choice position was the most politically beneficial; in the five districts which ousted an incumbent, the winning challengers were identified as pro-choice. Pro-choice activists in the state also claimed victory through incumbent conversion on the issue. According to one pro-choice organization director, "you had six to ten incumbents who changed their position on abortion."[8] The Virginia pro-choicers focused more on the Wilder victory rather than the several elections they lost.

Debate over which side truly experienced electoral victories inevitably led to differences over the resulting composition of the legislature. One New Jersey pro-choice activist observed that the number of pro-choice legislators grew from 27 to 41 of the 80 assembly seats between the spring primary and the general election. She attributed this to lawmakers reconsidering their positions and to several pro-life electoral defeats. In contrast, one pro-life activist's count shows 34 pro-life and only 30 pro-choice legislators in the post-election assembly, with the remaining sixteen members likely to support a parental consent bill.[9]

It is commonly assumed that voters choose candidates who agree with them on the issues. Our findings suggest that abortion can sway election outcomes if the contest is close, can affect campaign dynamics and can mobilize activists and other

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[8]"Both Sides in Abortion Controversy Claim Victory in Legislative Elections," *Star Ledger*, 11/30/89.

[9]*Ibid.*

campaign resources. However, the 1989 elections provide little evidence that elections are referenda or that vast numbers of voters have the knowledge required to translate their concern with this issue into votes on election day. Focusing greater resources on getting the message across to voters, on educating them about the relevance of the issue to their vote decisions and about why they should care about the issue positions of the legislative candidates, could produce a decisive issue vote. However, the 1989 elections show only *promise* of such potential in legislative elections.

## MENTIONING THE ISSUE

Legislative candidates who saw the abortion issue as playing a role in their campaigns often saw it as part of a broader range of issues drawing activists into their coalitions, or as one of several considerations affecting their level of support. Voters, like legislative candidates, tended to see the abortion issue as more important in the gubernatorial race than in the legislative races. While over half of Virginia voters saw the issue as very important in general and 38% of Virginia voters mentioned it as important in the gubernatorial race, only 4% did so when asked about important issues in the House of Delegates race in their district. Similarly, only 4% of New Jersey voters mentioned it as important in the New Jersey General Assembly races, compared to 21% who saw it as an important issue in the Florio-Courter contest and close to half who said it was generally a very important issue.[10] Several activists offered their perspectives on why such a difference might occur:

> *There's naturally a focus on the statewide offices.... Why get excited about a bunch of diffuse legislative races, when there's six million dollars worth of TV ads showing these two good-looking guys named Jim every night at dinner and you've got to turn to page B-19 of your local newspaper to find anything on the legislative race.*
>
> *Those who followed the issue more closely would look to who is the real decision-maker on this issue and Congressman Florio saying that he would veto any legislation that restricted a women's right to choose. People may have had a comfort level that it would be stopped*

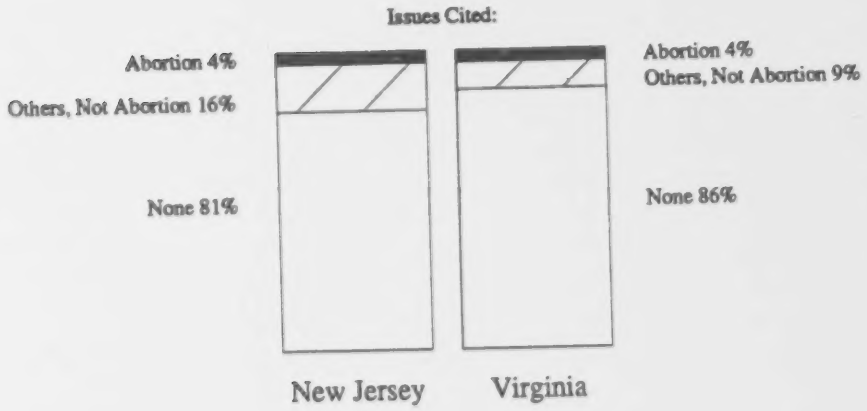
[10]The exact question wording was as follows: In Virginia, "Are there any issues in the election for House of Delegates that are particularly important to you?" [If yes], "What issues are particularly important?" In New Jersey, "Are there any issues in the election for state assembly that are particularly important to you?" If yes, "What are the most important issues to you in the election for state assembly?"

*at the Governor's office. And so with local candidates, maybe they would be more accepting of them not being pro-choice but would look to their view on other local issues that affect them.*

*The consciousness of people about what's going on in assembly races is very low.... Most people don't even know what an assemblyman is. Even where we live, which is fairly...affluent and educated, you ask a lot of people what an assemblyperson is and they don't know. And ask them where the various candidates stand on particular issues, I think you'll probably be down to around 25% recognition.*

Indeed, the low prominence of the abortion issue arose from a general absence of knowledge about the races and about important issues in the races, rather than from rejection of the issue per se (Figure 3-1). In both states fewer than one out of every five voters could name even one issue that was important to them in the

Figure 3-1:
Percent Citing Abortion Issue
As Important in Legislative Races



assembly or delegate races. The 4% who mentioned the abortion issue as important in New Jersey are 18% of the New Jersey voters who could mention *any* issue as important in the legislative races; the 4% mentioning the issue in Virginia are 32% of that state's voters who mentioned any issues in these races. Most of the New Jersey voters who mentioned this issue in the legislative race opposed restrictions; but those opposing restrictions and those favoring new restrictions were about equally represented among Virginia voters concerned with this issue in legislative races.[11]

There is no doubt that the potential for mobilization on the issue was realized more in the gubernatorial race than in the legislative elections. However, the importance of the issue to the voters differed across districts. Our surveys of voters in eight legislative districts where there was a potential for it to be important suggested the abortion issue was mentioned more frequently in districts with the following conditions: where candidates took clear stands or could frame their opponents' positions so there were sharp differences; where they used the issue aggressively in communication with the voters; and where activists were involved. In sum, the issue was usually more important where resources were used to educate voters about its importance to their legislative vote choice and about the stands of the candidates who ran in these lower profile races.

Of the eight legislative districts polled prior to the election,[12] the issue tended to be cited more frequently than average in New Jersey District 6 and in Virginia House of Delegates District 46. Among those districts where it was less frequently cited were New Jersey District 13 and Virginia House District 78. Some factors to explain these differences are discussed below.[13]

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[11]In both cases the number of individuals is small and care must be taken in making inferences about the profile of people concerned with the issue.

[12]During the two weeks prior to the election, we surveyed voters in New Jersey legislative district 6, 10, 13, and 30 and in Virginia House of Delegates districts 44, 46, 69, and 78. See Appendix for details.

[13]One concern with a pre-election poll is that voters may learn more about candidates closer to the election. In that case, voters responding during the early part of the survey period may be less informed than those who respond the day before the election. There was no indication that this occurred with regard to this issue. Comparison of the proportion of voters mentioning the issue over the course of the two weeks showed no tendency for voters to mention the issue more frequently as the election approached.

### Where the Issue Was Mentioned More Frequently

*New Jersey District 6.* The 6th District candidates were two pro-life Republican ten-year incumbents, Thomas Shusted and John Rocco, and two pro-choice Democrats, Barbara Berman, a former one-term legislator, and Mary Ellen Talbott, a retired judge.[14] When the votes were counted on election night, Rocco had won by a narrow margin, challenger Talbott had lost by a few hundred votes, and it appeared that Berman had defeated Shusted by 122 votes. However, on recount, Shusted defeated Berman by only 34 votes — a win for both pro-life candidates, but hardly a win that would be expected in a race against two well-entrenched incumbents.

While the coattails of the popular Democratic gubernatorial nominee probably helped the pro-choice Democrats come close to ousting the incumbent pro-lifers (especially since this district was adjacent to Florio's Congressional district), the race might not have been as close without the *Webster* decision. Those opposing restrictions outnumbered those favoring restrictions by a margin of five to two in this district. Twelve percent, or slightly more than one out of nine voters in our pre-election survey, mentioned the issue as important in the legislative race. That the majority of "mentioners" were pro-choice may have benefitted the challengers and played an important role in making the outcome so close. At the same time, in a race decided by 34 votes, the pro-life voters who were a minority of these mentioners may have represented a segment of voters crucial to the outcome.

Democratic women *and* Republican women cited the issue as important (15% and 14% respectively), suggesting that the issue could potentially pull voters across party lines. Awareness of this issue among the electorate did not occur automatically. It was undoubtedly the result of some of the following factors:

- The pro-choice candidates used the issue aggressively in their campaign messages to voters.

- Media coverage of the campaign focused heavily on this issue and forced all candidates to define clearly where they stood.

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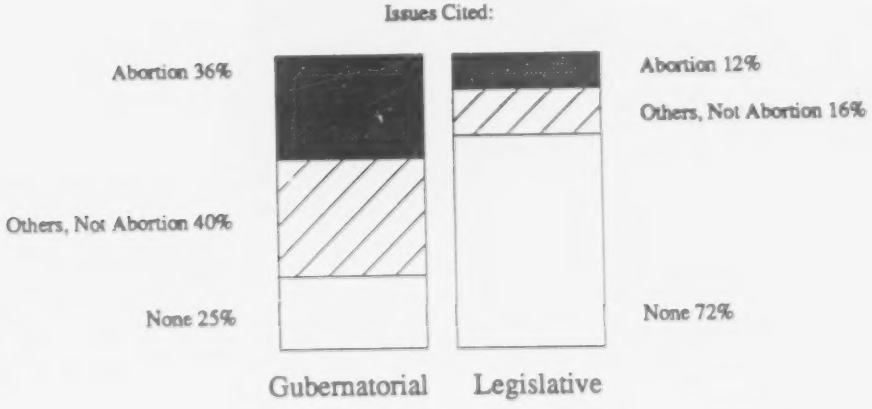
[14]One Republican favored abortion only in the case of rape, incest, or a threat to the life of the mother, while the other incumbent Republican favored a total ban on abortion. The Democrats emphasized the choice aspects of the abortion debate and were viewed by the activist groups as clearly pro-choice candidates.

- Pro-life groups sponsored radio and newspaper ads and church leaders issued statements the Sunday before the election targeted primarily toward Catholic (and presumably pro-life) voters.

- The activity of Choice-PAC, the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) and NOW supplemented candidate activity in this area. NWPC used this district as a test case for its Empower America Project which is aimed at educating pro-choice women who might cross party lines to vote for a pro-choice candidate on this issue.

That *only* 12% of the voters sampled in this district mentioned the abortion issue as important in the assembly contest also indicated the unrealized potential that the issue had. Only a fraction of those who saw the issue as important in the gubernatorial race or who believed it generally important linked their concern with this issue to this race (Figure 3-2). The low saliency of the issue was less an informed decision that the issue was unimportant than it was a reflection of voters' lack of information. The patterns observed in the 6th District were similar in the

Figure 3-2:
Percent Citing Abortion Issue
As Important in New Jersey District 6

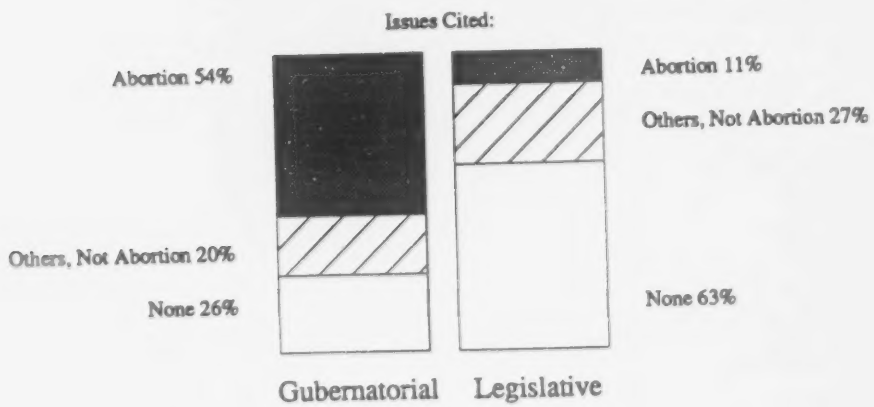


Virginia House of Delegates District 44. A major difference between the 6th and the 44th Districts was that the distinctions between candidates were less clear cut in the 44th.

***Virginia House District 44.*** In the race for the open seat in the 44th House of Delegates District, Linda T. (Toddy) Puller, a pro-choice Democrat endorsed and aided by pro-choice groups, lost by 260 votes (or 1.5 percentage points) to Gerald Fill, a Republican. Eleven percent of the voters in this district mentioned the abortion issue as important in the legislative race, and this seemed to bode well for the Democratic candidate, since mentioners opposing restrictions outnumbered those favoring restrictions by about four to one.[15]

As was true in New Jersey's 6th Assembly District and in all the other districts polled, voters were more likely to mention the issue as important in the gubernatorial race than in the legislative race. In District 44, five times as many voters mentioned it as important in the gubernatorial race as mentioned it in the delegate race (Figure 3-3). Many voters who were concerned about this issue in general and linked that concern to gubernatorial politics obviously did not connect that concern with this delegate race. Aside from the relative obscurity of these low-

Figure 3-3:
Percent Citing Abortion Issue
As Important in Virginia District 44




[15]Republican women were slightly less likely than Democratic women to mention the issue as important (11% compared to 16%).

interest legislative races (which likely hampered voter education efforts in this as well as other districts), another major impediment to Puller making this an issue was that her opponent's position was unclear. As one pro-choice activist explained, Puller had a difficult task:

> *Where this issue really kicks in for pro-choice voters is when you have [candidates who are]...on opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of the abortion issue. And then you can make a real clear distinction in the positions and the minds of the voters. And I don't think we were able to do that as successfully in the Puller race because he [Fill] was basically sort of bouncing around — we couldn't nail down his position.... If I could redo that race, I think we would have tried to do a shadowing effort like we did with Coleman, and have pro-choice picketers at his events, and try and force the issue a little bit more publicly with him.*

Another involved in the campaign elaborated:

> *We were never sure of the opponent's [Fill's] position on it. And many people would call both candidates to ask. I remember one particular call where a woman called up and asked...and the worker told her, and she said thank you, and it was clear that was the wrong position for this woman. And she called up [Fill]...I don't what she got but she called back and said I just wanted you to know I'm going to vote for your candidate although I do not agree with her position on this issue. But at least she has a position.*

Characterizations of the Republican candidate's position on the issue differed from one source to another. According to one Republican party activist:

> *Fill is pro-choice as far as I know. That's sort of the way he described himself to me.... There are variations or gradations on the term.... But I think basically Fill had to deal with the situation where the Democrats, their Democratic opponents, were trying to say, hey, look, you're a Republican, you must be pro-life.*

While this is not a resounding endorsement of Fill as pro-choice, he was not endorsed by any pro-life groups.

One *Washington Post* article characterized both candidates as pro-choice, saying that both Fill and Puller favored a woman's right to choose whether to have an abortion, but that Fill opposed the use of public funds to pay for abortions, except

in cases of rape, incest or danger to the health of the mother. However, Fill's views were not always clear, as his reply to a *Washington Post* question posed to all candidates suggests:

> *The recent Supreme Court decision...has generated a lot of controversy and uncertainty over which state laws regulating abortion are constitutional and which are not. The Supreme Court will decide several more landmark cases on abortion later this year. It is, therefore, unwise to change Virginia law until these cases are resolved. Abortion should not be used as a method of birth control, and public funds should not be used for abortion on demand. I support using public funds for abortions in cases of rape, incest, or when the life of the woman is in danger. As a parent, I support a requirement of parental notification for abortions involving minors. Greater aid and support should be given to encourage adoption, care for unwanted children, provide contraceptive information, prevent and cope with the growing crisis of premature drug-addicted and AIDS-afflicted babies.* (11/2/89, Virginia section, p. 5)

To further muddy the waters, a few days before the election a local newspaper characterized Fill's position as more pro-life. According to this article:

> *On the abortion issue, Fill says he opposes using taxpayer money to finance abortions for those who use it as a means of birth control. Instead, abortion should be restricted to cases of rape, incest, or when the health of the mother is in danger, he says.* (*Fairfax Journal*, 10/23/89, p. A3)

In addition, literature aimed at turning conservative pro-life voters against Puller was allegedly distributed in the district. As one Democratic party activist explained:

> *One of the things that some groups do on behalf of certain candidates — and it's usually the pro-life groups — is leaflet cars at Catholic church services or fundamentalist church services. And sometimes they even put things in the bulletins.... This group,...Leadership for Virginia or something like that, did leaflet the Saturday Catholic Mass...at...one or both of the Catholic churches.... We took that group to court and got an injunction against them and they did not do it on Sunday morning.... But they had leafletted, they had put that flyer a lot of places.... They did hand it out at the polls, even though they weren't supposed to.*

Despite Fill's lack of clarity on the issue, Puller also used the issue in her campaign efforts. Pro-choice groups worked for her to try to frame Fill as *not* pro-choice and define Puller as pro-choice. Puller did this in several different ways. One was to send a mailing to 15,000 voters which emphasized "choice"; the other was to send a mailing emphasizing her opponent's lack of clarity, which read:

> *What do they have in common with Gerald Fill? A yo-yo, a Slinky, an acrobat. They all move the same way. Up and down on abortion, back and forth on taxes, development acrobatics. You know where Toddy Puller stands. Pro-choice. Try following Fill on abortion. You'll find your head bobbing up and down like a yo-yo. First in a meeting of the Fairfax County School Board, Fill bellows against family life education like a bull horn and pledges to abolish it if he's elected. Then there's his anti-choice position on abortion, but he still says he'll support sex education.*

Despite the fact that Puller was associated in the voter's minds with an unpopular elected official whose campaign she had run and despite the fact that her opponent was considered pro-choice by some, she was successful in raising the importance of the issue to voters. Her effort to tag her opponent as pro-life may have been aided by his Republican party label, in light of the hotly contested gubernatorial campaign. But the saliency of the abortion issue was not always as successfully emphasized, as the case of Virginia's House of Delegates District 78 shows.

## Where the Issue Was Mentioned Less Frequently

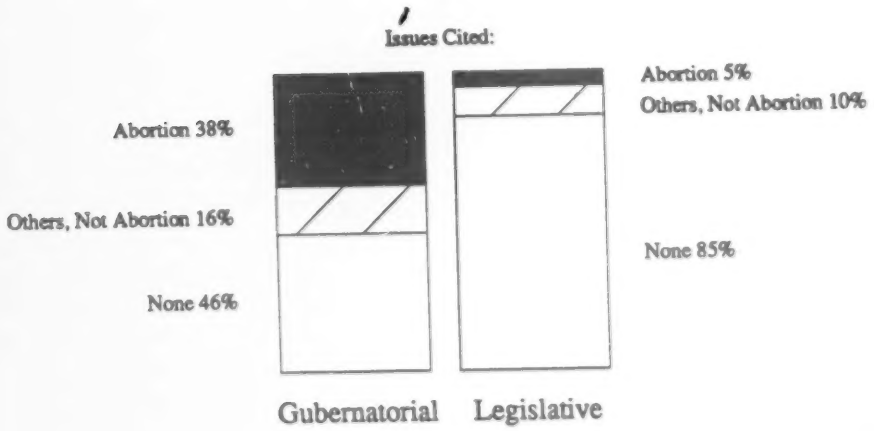
***Virginia House District 78.*** If group endorsements are an indicator, the abortion issue had the potential to be important in this Chesapeake district. Willa Bazemore, the Democratic, NOW-endorsed candidate, and Randy Forbes, the Republican, endorsed by the Virginia Society for Human Life, battled for an open seat. While 38% of the voters (mostly pro-choice) in this district saw the abortion issue as an important issue in the gubernatorial race, only five percent of the voters (predominantly pro-life) cited the issue as important (Figure 3-4). On the one hand, the 78th District voters' potential interest in this issue was obviously better translated into action in the gubernatorial race. On the other hand, voters' concerns with any issues were not linked well with this delegate race. Indeed, the five percent mentioning the abortion issue were fully one-third of the voters who mentioned any issue as important in this race. So the race seemed to be relatively devoid of issues. The small proportion of voters citing this issue was probably due to two factors: 1) pro-life Forbes, the candidate whose position on the issue was clearest, chose not to

make the issue a top priority in campaign messages and 2) pro-choice opponent Bazemore was viewed as inconsistent on the issue and was on the defensive.

One reporter summarized the positions of the candidates and noted the resulting confusion to voters:

> *Abortion, a potentially polarizing issue in the race, has served to confuse the voters. Forbes announced on the first day that a top priority of his tenure in the House would be restricting Virginians' right to an abortion except in the case of rape, incest, or where pregnancy is a threat to the mother's life. During the primary, Bazemore took the same position, but has since wavered on it, stating at one point that she was watching the "Phil Donahue Show" to help her decide. Last week she said she could support restrictive legislation. Abortion as birth control, she said, "causes me to shudder." But, she said, "It is very, very difficult to punish someone on a moral issue."* (*The Virginia Pilot-Ledger Star*, 10/15/89, p. B1)

Figure 3-4:
Percent Citing Abortion Issue
As Important in Virginia District 78



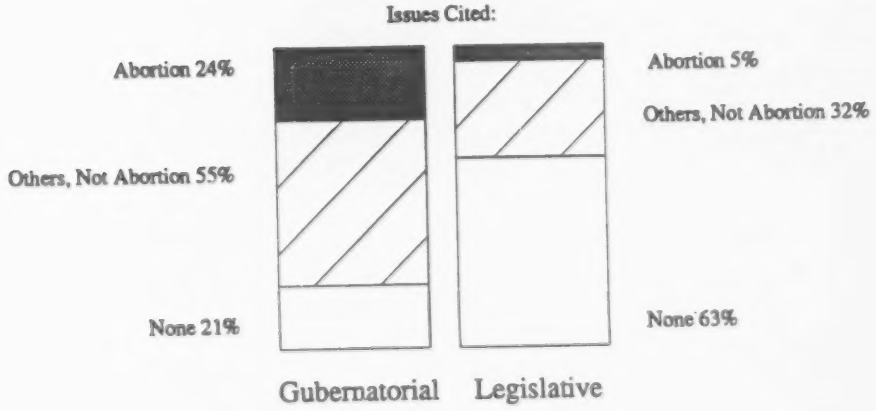
And this perspective was similar to those sympathetic to Bazemore:

> *She wasn't real clear about the abortion issue. So she confused people and she was beaten quite badly.*

The potential to make the issue a key factor in the legislative campaign seemed lost in a campaign that featured one candidate waffling and another lacking an incentive to emphasize the issue. At the same time, the nature of the race — low information and low interest — probably would have depressed interest to some extent (relative to the gubernatorial race) even if the lines between the candidates had been clearly drawn.

***New Jersey District 13.*** As in Virginia District 44, pro-choice Democrats attempted to use this issue against opponents whose positions were difficult to characterize. Pro-choice endorsed Democrats Irvin Beaver and Richard Cooper

Figure 3-5:
Percent Citing Abortion Issue
As Important in New Jersey District 13



unsuccessfully challenged Republican incumbents, Joann Smith (pro-life endorsed) and Joseph Kyrillos, Jr. (endorsed by neither side). In this district where voters are more inclined to oppose new restrictions than to favor them (26% favored restrictions, 62% opposed further restrictions), voters were more interested in the issue in the gubernatorial race than in the assembly race. Only five percent of the voters cited the issue as important to them at the legislative level, even though 24% had cited it as important to them in the gubernatorial election (Figure 3-5). One Democrat observed:

> *The 13th District is probably the most enigmatic of all the districts.... Polling indicated to us that there was going to be a close election, and that abortion was going to be more key.... [In] the 13th District, of nine mail pieces, we did two there that were devoted to abortion. I think that this was a classic case of voters having an opinion on the abortion issue but not [being] willing to carry it out.*

The Republican candidates were more difficult to characterize. Although Smith was endorsed by the Pro-Life PAC which stated that she was on their side, her position on the issue was described in a variety of different ways throughout the campaign period. Shortly after the *Webster* decision, she was described as anti-abortion by local newspapers, but she was also said to oppose state restrictions while favoring federal restrictions such as a constitutional ban on abortion funding. According to a *Home News* article several days before the election:

> *Smith has been endorsed by the Right-to-Life PAC which supports candidates advocating abortion restrictions. But Smith said she cannot support state laws restricting abortion; those restrictions have to come from the Federal Government. If they do not, she said, "Women will become carpetbaggers running across state lines."* (11/5/89, p. B3).

On the other hand, she was described as not wanting government to tell women what to do, not wanting to be in a position herself of telling women what to do, and as stating that she would have to see a bill before she could say how she would vote. According to the *Asbury Park Press*:

> *"However, being the realist that I am, I will not do anything to force another woman to do something that she doesn't want to do," Mrs. Smith said. "Legislatively I won't vote for anything that controls women's bodies."* (10/19/89, p. B9).

Prior to *Webster*, she also co-sponsored a bill to prohibit the offering of health services relating to birth control, pregnancy and abortion by a school district. She accepted the Pro-Life PAC endorsement and they also worked for her.

Her running mate, Joseph Kyrillos, was endorsed by neither the pro-life nor the pro-choice groups. He was described by some pro-choice groups as anti-abortion and by others as having mixed views, and by pro-life groups as "sitting on the fence." He felt he was not sitting on the fence, but had a moderate view, favoring the banning of abortion after viability, further restricting public funding of abortions, and supporting parental notification. By the end of the campaign, he was describing himself as pro-choice with restrictions, thus presenting a very difficult target for his opponents to tag with a label.

Despite the fact that the Republican candidates were difficult to characterize on the issue, Beaver and Cooper did attempt to do so in two mailings addressed to this issue. One of their flyers stated:

> *Smith and Kyrillos want government to make the choice, not us. Joann Smith supports a constitutional amendment to ban abortion. Joseph Kyrillos wants more restrictions on abortion. Beaver and Cooper think government must not interfere in such a private family decision.*

They showed pictures of themselves with their families, and ended the text of the flyer with:

> *We have more faith in people making the right decision for themselves than we do in government making it for them.*

They accused the Republican candidates of doing what some had accused the Courter campaign of doing — waffling — and yet it appeared not to have hurt them, because the voters seemed not only uninterested in the issue, but also uninformed, and were inclined to see other factors as important. Exactly why this occurred, particularly given the assistance of pro-choice groups, is unclear.

Why did the abortion issue fail to have as big an impact on voters as was anticipated by the Democrats? Several reasons have been offered by observers. One is that the use of only one or two paid pieces on the abortion issue may not be adequate to convey to the voters and engrave on the voters' minds the importance of the issue and the position of where the candidates stand. The second plausible reason is that other issues seemed more important to voters and occupied their limited attention span. The Cooper and Beaver defeat was not a rejection of their position. It

was the result of voters failing to see the abortion issue as important to that race and, as we will discuss in the next section, they had little idea where any of the candidates stood on the issue. Indeed, voter knowledge of where all four candidates stood was quite low in this district as well as in some others.

## VOTER'S KNOWLEDGE OF CANDIDATE POSITIONS

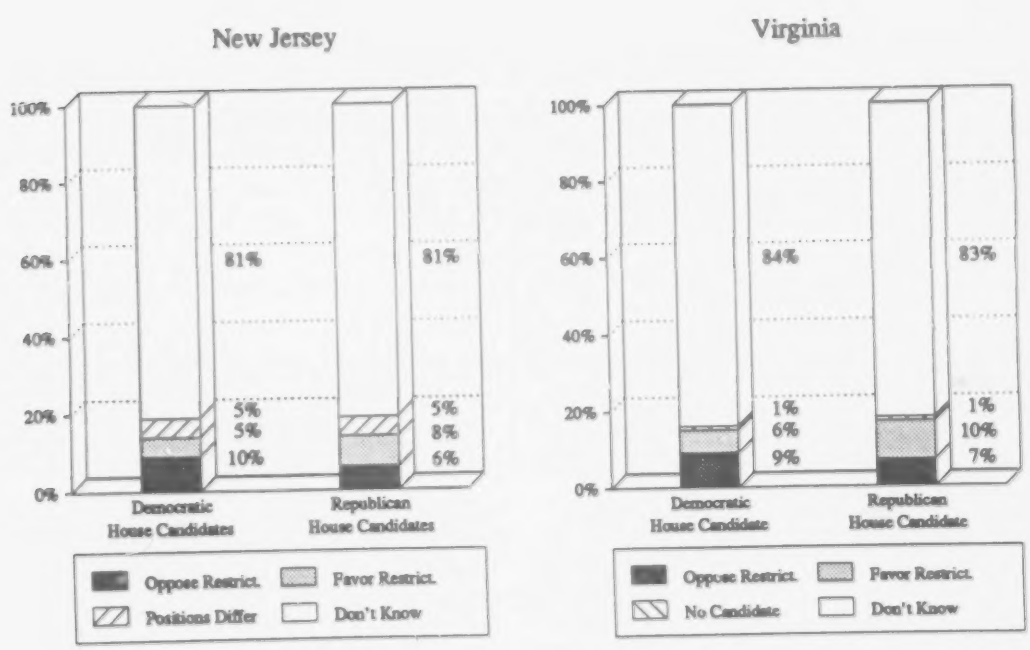
Voters knew far less about the legislative candidates' positions on the abortion-issue than about the gubernatorial candidates' stands. Some candidates asserted that the voters had adequate information about where they stood on the issue or that the voters' views were expressed in their vote. However, statewide, only about one out of seven voters in either state could guess where the Democratic and Republican candidates from their districts stood on this issue. At the same time, these data likely *overestimate* voter information about legislative candidates because we cannot tell whether voters are correct in their assessments[16] (Figure 3-6). About three out of four reported that they did not know where either legislative candidate stood. This statewide dearth of information suggests that: 1) Voters are far less likely to have the knowledge required to make an informed issue vote on this issue in legislative elections than in the gubernatorial races and 2) knowledge of candidate stands is so low that outcomes of elections cannot be assumed to reflect voters' sentiments on the issue.

What we find across the legislative districts is that voter information is affected by the clarity of the candidates' positions on the issue and the resources expended to get the message across. However, even when resources are expended, New Jersey District 13 (Figure 3-7) shows that there are no guarantees that the messages will be picked up by the voters; this may have something to do with the demographics of the voters. Alternatively, even in those districts where relatively more voters are more interested in the issue, by absolute standards the voters are often uninformed and do not take advantage of the information that is available. This lower degree of concern with the abortion issue in legislative elections, we will see, reflects voters' low level of knowledge about these races rather than an informed decision that the issue is irrelevant to legislative politics.

[16]Indeed, about half the districts in Virginia had two-party competition, but only about two percent of the respondents volunteered that there was no contest in their district.

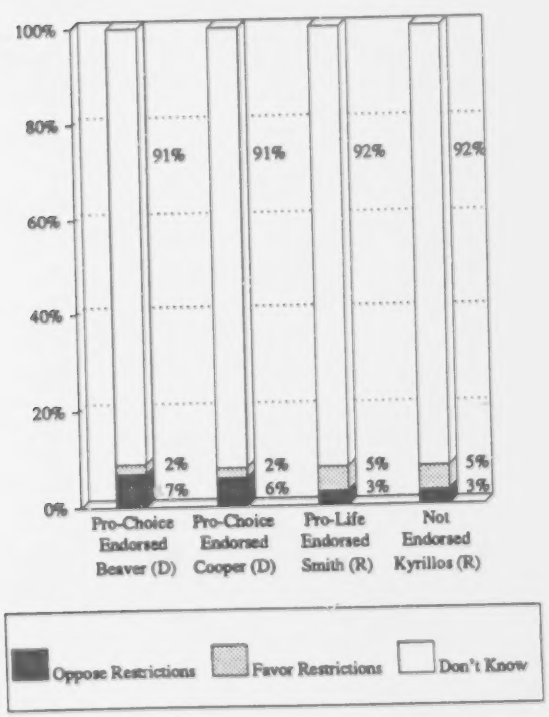
New Jersey District 6, which was the target of much pro-choice activity as well as general campaign activity, was one of the better informed districts. However, as Figure 3-8 shows, the vast majority of voters were uninformed about the candidates' stands. Furthermore, about one-quarter to one-third of those who guessed where the candidates stood on the question of restrictions, guessed incorrectly, for Berman and Talbott were strongly opposed to restrictions and Shusted and Rocco favored restrictions. The extensive efforts undertaken by the pro-choice, and to a lesser extent by the pro-life, groups to educate targeted groups of voters, combined with the efforts of the pro-choice candidates to emphasize the issue undoubtedly educated some voters. Their success, however, was far from complete. Undoubtedly, neither the pro-choice nor pro-life groups wanted to educate so broadly that they

Figure 3-6:
Voters' Perceptions of Legislative Candidates' Positions on New Restrictions in New Jersey and Virginia



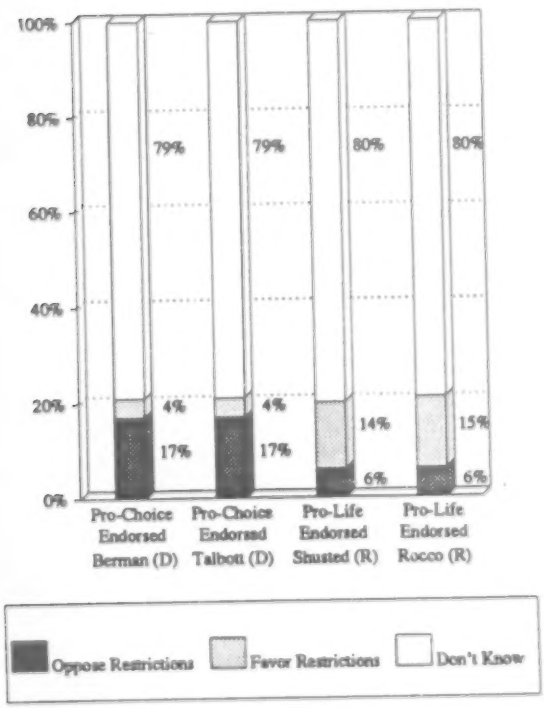
might mobilize the opposition. However, the fact is that despite the thousands of dollars spent, the vast majority of voters — even those who thought the issue was important in the gubernatorial race — remained uninformed. As a result, these elections do not necessarily reflect the will of the people. Moreover, the cost of educating voters in these low profile elections is not small. While it has become almost obligatory to lament the low level of information voters have about elections, the range of voter awareness from one type of election to another suggests that the "knowledge gap" between gubernatorial and legislative races may be partially a result of voters simply not understanding government adequately to know why they should care who their legislators are or where they stand on this issue.

Figure 3-7:
Voters' Perceptions of Legislative Candidates' Positions on New Restrictions in New Jersey District 13



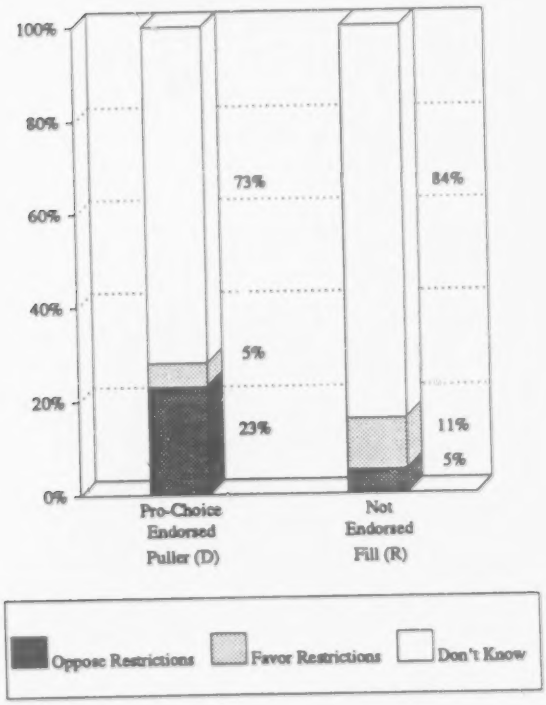
District 13 in New Jersey is illustrative of the fact that expenditures do not ensure receptivity to the messages (Figure 3-7). About nine out of ten of the voters failed to place any given legislative candidate. Beaver and Cooper sent out two mailings on this issue, and were clearly opposed to restrictions, but only about one in 15 voters knew that. Furthermore, their attempts to paint their opponents as pro-life were to no avail, for voters were almost as likely to say that Kyrillos and Smith opposed restrictions as they were to say that they favored restrictions. At any rate, the voters can be described as uninformed on this issue in this district. This occurred despite assistance from both pro-choice groups and pro-life groups in the district.

Figure 3-8:
Voters' Perceptions of Legislative Candidates' Positions on New Restrictions in New Jersey District 6



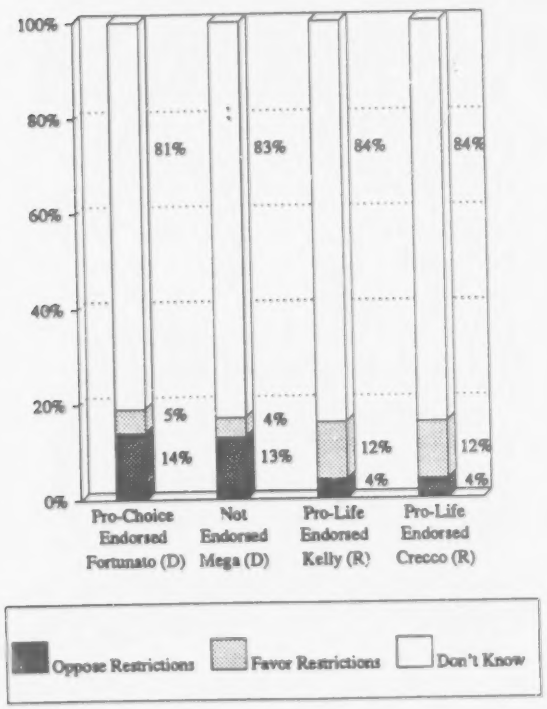
Others were more successful in defining their opponents even if the opponents wished to defy labelling. In Virginia District 44, voters were more likely to say Puller was opposed to restrictions and Fill favored restrictions. Nevertheless Puller was more effective in defining herself to the voters than she was in defining her opponent as pro-life: 84% of voters did not even attempt to place Fill while "only" 73% refrained from placing Puller (Figure 3-9).

Figure 3-9:
Voters' Perceptions of Legislative Candidates' Positions on New Restrictions in Virginia District 44



Democrat Puller's efforts to frame herself as the pro-choice candidate and her difficult-to-categorize opponent as in favor of new restrictions may have also been aided by voters using party labels as cues for placing the candidates. The possibility that at least some were treating party labels as perhaps synonymous with pro-life and pro-choice stands is also suggested by the fact that in New Jersey, when voters were asked to place running mates from the same party who differed on the issue, they often placed them together. While such findings can only be offered tentatively, this pattern was suggested in two of the New Jersey districts where running mates

Figure 3-10:
Voters' Perceptions of Legislative Candidates' Positions on New Restrictions in New Jersey District 30



differed on the issue.[17] In New Jersey District 30, where challengers Ann Mega (pro-life Democrat) and Buddy Fortunato (pro-choice Democrat) were running mates, most of those who could place them on the issue characterized both Democrats as opposing restrictions rather than one as opposing and the other as favoring new restrictions. At the same time, voters were more likely to see the pro-life Republican incumbents, Kelley and Crecco, as favoring restrictions (Figure 3-10).

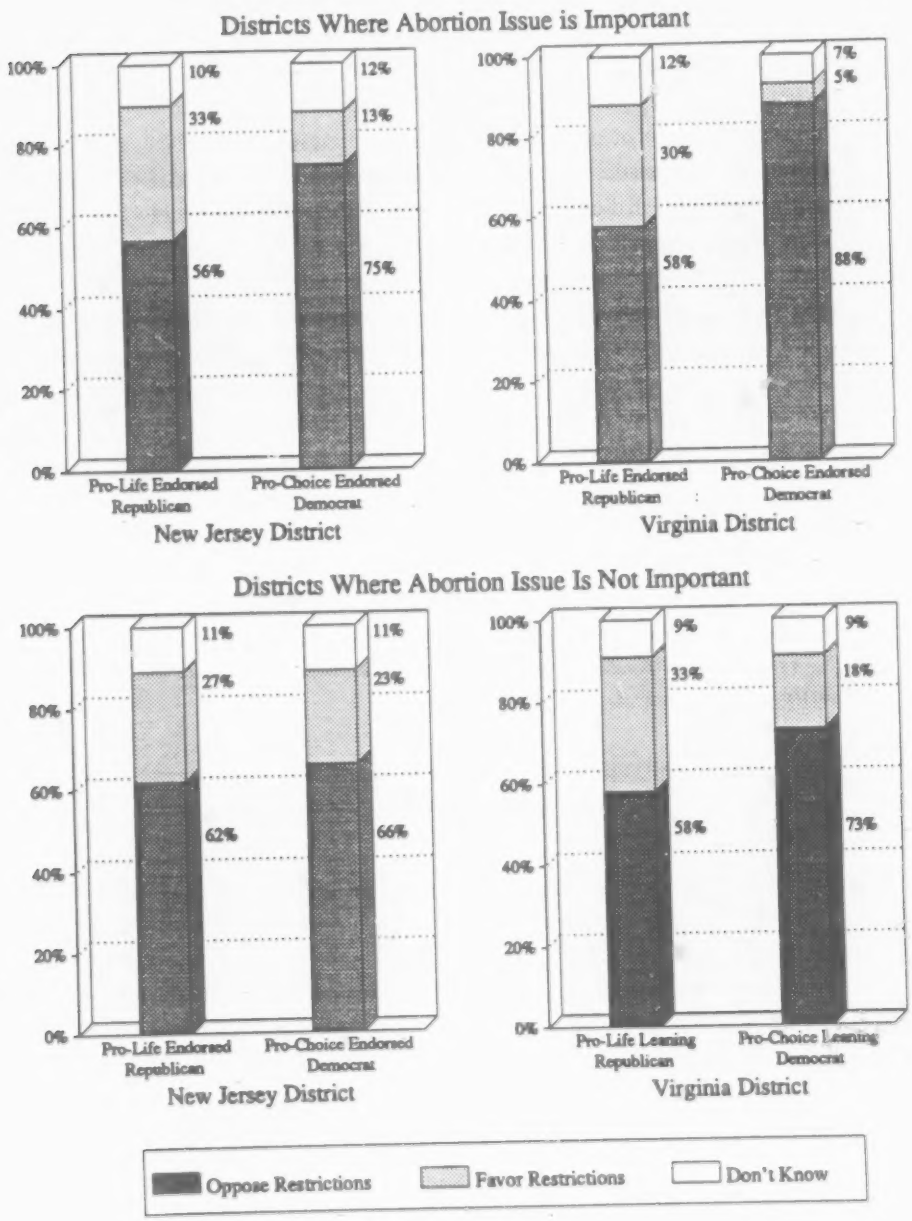
## THE IMPLICATIONS FOR REPRESENTATION OF THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

Many observers assume that legislators reflect the will of the people on this issue and that the actions of legislatures are an indicator of the pulse of the electorate. Yet if voters are uninformed about the candidates' stands on issues, the mere fact that these legislators are "closer to the people" than governors, members of Congress or the President may belie the reality that the voters vote for candidates with whom they unknowingly disagree on issues they say are important. This is the nature of representative government in a two-party system where issues divide parties and voters choose elected officials to speak for them on a variety of issues. When voters lack adequate knowledge about the choices they have available to them on election day, or when they fail to connect their issue concern with legislative races, the agreement between candidates' views and their supporters' may depend more on luck than on information. The challenge for democracy becomes one of educating voters to see the relevance of legislative elections to issues *and* providing information so they can connect their concern with the issue to their choices for these often low-profile, yet important offices. Informed voters aware of the candidates' stands on the issue might decide that the issue is irrelevant and thus they may not act in a way to ensure their representatives do what they want done on the issue; but, it is an entirely different matter if the electorate is uninformed and as a result fails to use the franchise to ensure that representatives reflect their views.

Our measure of representation is the extent to which the voters' position on new restrictions corresponds to the views of the candidates they said they intended to support on election day. (We have excluded those who are undecided about which candidate they will support.) Figure 3-11 shows the profiles of candidate supporters'

[17]This finding is offered tentatively because the phrasing of the question asked simultaneously for both Democratic candidates' positions. This required the voters to take the initiative of distinguishing between the candidate positions and thus may have led some to give the same answer for both.

## Figure 3-11:
## Attitudes Toward New Restrictions Among Legislative Candidates' Supporters In Districts Where Issue Is and Is Not Important



attitudes in four districts: two where the abortion issue was more frequently cited by voters and two where the issue was less frequently mentioned as important although the candidates' endorsements suggested the potential for importance. Only two candidates (one Democrat and one Republican) from New Jersey districts are included for comparison purposes.

Figure 3-11 suggests the likelihood that elections will ensure that officeholders will do what voters want done on this issue. In each case, pro-choice identified candidates usually have more supporters who oppose restrictions than do the pro-life identified candidates; similarly larger proportions of the pro-life candidates' electoral coalitions favor restrictions than do those of their pro-choice opponents. At the same time, many voters (in some cases a majority of supporters) disagreed with the candidates they supported. Correspondence between views of voters and the candidates they supported was greater (although far from perfect) where the issue was important. Where it was less important, candidate-supporter correspondence tended to be even more a matter of chance, depending on how closely voters' attitudes aligned with other cues such as party affiliation.[18] Given the voters' low level of information in state legislative races, the mere fact that someone has been elected is not necessarily a mandate on the abortion issue — at least not from the electorate at large. Some who won shared the views of the majority of those who supported them in the election. In other cases the winners' views about new government restrictions are at odds with those who supported them. It is little wonder that one well-known, incumbent legislator who was seldom asked about the issue saw his pro-life endorsement as having little impact:

> *A...survey that I did in September indicated 90% name recognition in the county. So, I just don't think abortion played more than a few hundred votes.... You are dealing in order of magnitude of hundreds of votes, you know? Not thousands. And anyone who is endorsed by pro-life loses some support on the other side, [but] I think it's probably almost a wash.*

This lack of information about the candidates' stands has profound implications for public policy on this issue in the post-*Webster* era. It places some legislators in a somewhat uncomfortable situation. If they change their positions on the issue to more closely reflect the views of their constituents, they may be viewed as "wafflers" or political opportunists. If they remain firm in positions based on

[18]This figure omits names and districts because they are irrelevant to the point being made.

personal convictions on the less popular side of public opinion, they then may be placed in the position of voting for new bills that do not necessarily reflect the views of their constituents. Or if they follow the will of the people, they might have to violate their own moral code. Constituents may be unaware that their legislators disagree with them about the abortion issue until they discover how their legislator has voted on a parental consent bill or on a total ban on abortion.

We asked legislative candidates — both those who won and those who lost — how they would deal with the abortion issue as representatives of their districts, given the multifaceted highly divisive nature of the issue and the possibility that they may not always know where their constituents stand on it. We coded responses into categories (more than one if necessary) reflecting the ideas conveyed by the legislators. While almost all candidates noted the importance, if not necessity, of taking a clear stand on this issue, there were differences in how that stand should be determined. One candidate's comments about the dilemma of representation highlighted the tensions others like him must address and resolve.

> *It [the abortion issue] shows really what you as an individual think government should do or what you should do as a representative.... There are no real right answers to this, because if you take pure Greek democracy where you have a very small, little polis back in the old days,...you could vote on every issue. You just say there are twenty-two people in town and if you get twelve votes that's what the law is.... [Today] you try to...get out and listen to the people as much as possible because I think that's important. However you do that, whether you read or you talk to them or you go to groups.... On the other hand, I believe that people elect people to be their representatives and that's the term, a representative. And does the representative merely count heads? Or is that person chosen because they're sometimes looked upon to...take the lead or give leadership on an issue.... I would think abortion is one of them.*

The majority of the legislative candidates with whom we spoke gave responses suggesting that their personal commitment to the issue would make it impossible to yield to public pressure, and this clearly points to the necessity for concerned voters to be informed about the candidates.

> *I made my position clear. Obviously there are people that I represent [who] do not agree with me. And there are those who do agree with me.... But we have to deal with it. And we have to make a judgement.... Maybe the next time they won't vote for me. I'm not a politician by livelihood.... I do it because I like to do it. I like to be*

*involved in government. But I'm not going to compromise my principles to be elected. It's just not that important to me.*

*In my particular case I have probably the stand [I took] years ago [and] I have stuck with it. I have been consistent. And even though folks disagree with me, they know that it's a sincerely held view, [not] one I just adopted for...them all. And I think they can forgive me.*

The next most frequently mentioned responses suggested that constituent representation would be simple on this issue since they shared the same views as most of the voters in their district.

*I was born and raised in the county I now live. My daddy lived there, my grandfather lived there and my great grandfather lived in the area so, you know, a lot of it is just I feel like I know the people totally.... I don't take any polls. But our area is more stable, if you please. People tend to stay there.... I seem to know each time I see a bill, sometimes in five seconds,...how to vote because I know how the people back home feel. So, I guess that's an advantage of a rural area.*

*I have no intention of operating any polls.... We did not have a high money, big kind of thing campaign.... But I've lived there and I've always lived [there]...so I would think after 36 years you acquire a certain feel for the district.... That's just my, you know, intuition.*

Finally, the least common response (although it may have been underreported, according to some legislators) was that representation on this issue was not a problem because they would not impose their own views on their constituents. Instead they would do what they thought most of their constituents wanted done on the issue.

*It's not for me to say that because of my religious convictions you've got to do thus and such.... I've got to look at it without being judgmental.... That's when I started looking, okay, 70% is right here [on this issue]. And I'm a little more over here, but I can't be that and represent the district and that's my purpose here. It's not for me to get down here and stand on the soapbox and preach.... That's not my job.*

*I poll extensively all the time. The reason for that is I have a high growth district, I have a lot of new voters.... So, to try to understand*

> *changing expectations with that volatile...electorate, both old and new, and trying to understand where they were coming from.... We found on the abortion issue that basically the majority of the voters in my district would prefer to vote for candidate A if he was pro-choice versus candidate B who was right-to-life.... So the position that I took in the election was, that I supported no changes to existing state laws in the state of Virginia.... I believe that as an elected representative, you represent the majority of your constituents. If those change, they used to be one way and they changed to another way, so be it. I don't believe that you run for office and you're there to represent yourself.*

Some clearly thought this third view was more common than some were willing to admit and saw representation in this vein as less than noble:

> *I think there are some legislators who are very definite in their opinions, both sides. And then there are others perhaps, maybe a majority who...vote according to how it's going to affect them.... To some it's more important to win and to be perpetuated as a legislator than to have a view either way.*

Some interpret this perspective toward representation as caving-in to public pressure, while others see it as the essence of representative democracy. In New Jersey, pro-choice activists' claims that formerly pro-life legislators had switched to pro-choice positions have been disputed by pro-life activists. Some may have shifted in order to avoid the anticipated wrath of the voters on election day. But others may have done so because activists' mobilization of pro-choice voters caused them to reassess where their constituents stood and shattered stereotypes about voters' attitudes. As one New Jersey pro-choice activist noted:

> *They [legislators] had never polled on these issues before, because everybody knew that people were anti-choice. In New Jersey and Trenton everybody was anti-choice. We're a Catholic state. Catholics are anti-choice, right? Because the Pope is, we all are. So there's an assumption that people had. And when the... poll[s] came out...last year, that blew people's minds.... Gradually people started doing their own polls and realized that, in fact, people were pro-choice everywhere, all over the state.... The big thing is that if you educate legislators and if they know that the voters feel this way, most of them will change their positions, even if they're good Catholics. Because they don't have to go out and have an abortion themselves or have their wife or daughter have an abortion. That's not the question. And you have to define that question.*

Clearly, what constitutes good representation on this issue is debatable among lawmakers and would-be lawmakers.

## CONCLUSION

The abortion issue was a factor in a number of legislative races in these two states, but these races were hardly referenda. The issue may have helped make some races much closer than they would have otherwise been. The issue may have influenced the issue agenda and assisted some candidates in garnering volunteers and funds which can play an important role even if the voters are unconcerned or uninformed about the issue. Yet, they were hardly referenda on future policy.

If the power to define abortion rights has returned to the states to be decided by elected officials in the post-*Webster* era, the results of this study suggest that the voters must be educated so that those who see the issue as generally important to them are better able to connect this concern with their voting decisions. This is true for pro-choice and pro-life candidates, since there was no evidence in legislative elections that either side has great advantages over the other in the education of their voters. Ultimately voters may decide that it is less important than other issues. But the decision should be made by an informed electorate rather than by one ignorant of candidate stands. This is a costly battle. As the findings from New Jersey District 6 and Virginia House District 44 suggest, even when education was more effective, only a small proportion received the messages. These small groups of voters can play critical roles in close elections, but at this point the level of knowledge of candidates' stands clearly suggests an electoral process far from a referendum. While an issue-voting electorate may decide gubernatorial races, and thus determine whether the will of the people is exercised through the veto, the extent to which the legislature reflects the will of the people on particular bills may well be more a matter of luck than informed consent. The more resources that are allocated to educate the voters about candidates, about why legislators are important, and why there is a connection between their concerns about abortion policy (as well as other issues) and these elections, the more likely that representation will be a matter of design rather than chance.

# CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

At least six conditions will be critical to determining whether and how the abortion issue affects general elections in 1990:

- **The staying power of the abortion issue as important to voters:** Certain factors may diminish its importance: the length of time since the *Webster* decision; the possibility that the parental consent decisions handed down in mid-1990 may not generate the same perception of threat to adult women's access to abortion that the *Webster* case did; and voter fatigue with an issue that engenders many mixed feelings in the minds of the voters. Alternatively, other factors may keep interest high: continued legislative battles and gubernatorial vetoes of new restrictions that keep the message in the news and heighten the sense of threat to personal liberty, the promise of more court decisions related to abortion rights that can at least spark media attention and ignite concern, and the apparent resurgence of activist activity.

- **The extent to which other issues that are closer to the problems voters face in their daily lives take precedence over the abortion issue:** This will depend in part on economic and political developments within states. Voter anger over auto insurance and shore pollution in New Jersey was simmering prior to the campaigns. In contrast, voters in Virginia seemed far more content with the status quo. Thus, even if Florio had stressed the abortion issue as much as Wilder did, New Jersey voters might not have seen it as campaign-relevant as Virginians did. Furthermore, making abortion policy a central campaign issue may be more difficult for challengers if they are running against popular incumbents who do not want to highlight the abortion issue in the election.

- **The relative success of pro-choice and pro-life activists and candidates in framing the issue and defining their opponents' positions:** The emphasis by pro-choicers on "choice" rather than "abortion," and the concomitant attempt by pro-lifers to highlight particularly unpopular instances when people may exercise "choice" is a continuing battle. How this plays out may hinge on who wins the battle of the sound bite. In New Jersey and Virginia, the issue was framed as choice, and thus the extent to which the results would have been replicated if the pro-life groups had been able to focus on "abortion as a means of birth control" or on parental consent remains unanswered. What is clear is that candidates and activists who want to make abortion policy a campaign issue need to convey successfully a message

allowing voters to connect their general interest in the abortion issue to the vote *and* to vote for the candidate closer to their own position. Wilder was successful not only because he raised the issue's saliency, but also because many conflicted voters were more inclined to see themselves as opposing new government restrictions rather than favoring them.

- **The willingness of at least one candidate to use the issue aggressively and to educate the voters about candidate differences on the issue and the link between election outcomes and abortion policy:** Candidates are vital in any plan to make this issue important. The differences between New Jersey and Virginia suggest that when candidates use the issue more aggressively, the voters may be more inclined to listen. This is important because in order for the issue to affect voting behavior, voters need information to help them differentiate between the candidates.

- **The relative ability of pro-choice groups and pro-life groups to sustain activity and the image of political clout:** If activists on one side or the other fade from view, then their opponents will be relatively advantaged. The problem facing the newly revived pro-choice movement is whether their supply of money and volunteers can be sustained as *Webster* fades from memory. The problems facing the pro-life movement are whether they can compensate for their financial disadvantage and whether they can sustain their supporters' enthusiasm if the focus of the abortion battle shifts from banning abortion to a gradual erosion of access through parental or spousal consent, viability testing, or "informed consent." These groups can play an important role in educating voters so that they can see a difference between candidates where these differences exist, and thus have the information required to cast an issue vote if they choose to do so.

- **The attitudes of voters in the state:** In races where the issue may become important, the more consistently pro-choice the state, the easier the task facing pro-choice candidates; the more consistently pro-life the voters' views are, the brighter the prospects for pro-life candidates. The views of the voters in a state may affect the ease of recruiting activists, will determine the most effective strategies, and will constrain the ability of candidates to shape a message which appeals to large groups of voters in the state. But the way the issue is framed will affect just how pro-choice or how pro-life state electorates appear.

# APPENDIX:
# NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

## DATA COLLECTION

Data used in this report are primarily from two sources: 1) telephone surveys of registered voters in New Jersey and Virginia prior to the election, and 2) unstructured (usually in-person) interviews with legislative candidates, gubernatorial campaign activists, party activists, and pro-choice and pro-life activists after the elections.

The interviews with registered voters were conducted between October 23 and November 6, 1989. Ten separate samples of voters (two statewide samples and eight legislative district samples) were used.

In both New Jersey and Virginia, interviews were completed with statewide samples of 800 registered voters, using random-digit dialing. The margin of error was $\pm$ 3.5%.

While the data reflect the actual election results, these are pre-election surveys, not exit polls. The New Jersey statewide data have been weighted using guidelines of Eagleton's Center for Public Interest Polling. Weighting does not alter the number of cases and has virtually no impact on the relationships observed. The Virginia statewide data are not weighted because we did not have a tested weighting scheme available to us. At first glance our survey seemed to have the same problems of other pre-election polls and the exit polls — overestimating Governor Wilder's lead. However, when we allocated the "don't know" voters to the candidate they seemed more likely to support, based on their answers to a series of relevant questions, the results corresponded closely to the actual election results. Details of the allocation procedure will be discussed below.

The remaining eight samples of approximately 350 each were randomly drawn from lists of registered voters with listed phone numbers in eight legislative districts.[1] The sampling procedure was such that voters were selected without regard to whether they actually had a listed phone number. If, however, a selected voter did not have a listed number, then the nearest neighbor with a listed number was selected. The margin of error is approximately $\pm$ 6.5%. The Virginia district-level samples were weighted to ensure that the proportion of women and men in the sample reflected the proportion in the electorate.

The New Jersey assembly districts sampled were the 6th, 10th, 13th and 30th districts. The Virginia House of Delegates districts sampled were the 44th, 46th,

[1]Certain factors made this the only reasonable method. First, legislative district boundaries do not follow telephone exchanges and thus a random digit sample could almost certainly include voters who lived outside the district. Second, because voters have such a low level of awareness of legislative politics, it is impractical to attempt to screen voters using self-reports of legislative district residence or of legislative candidates. Third, using current voter-registration lists is far less expensive than other labor intensive methods which would require mapping of legislative district boundaries and sampling of specialized directories.

69th, and 78th.[2] These districts were selected for their geographic diversity and the *potential* that the abortion issue could become relevant in the races (i.e., the candidates disagreed on the issue and the race was competitive). No claim is made that these are typical districts in the states. They were chosen with the assumption that if the abortion issue was not important in these races, it would not be important in other districts where the conditions were less favorable.

In New Jersey, unstructured interviews were attempted with candidates in the four surveyed legislative districts. In New Jersey, candidates were interviewed in additional districts targeted by the New Jersey Pro-Life PAC or the National Organization for Women. We also interviewed in districts where incumbents were defeated by challengers who clearly differed with them on the issue and in districts with an open seat where candidates differed. In Virginia, information about endorsements was not readily available, so districts where candidates differed on the issue or where activists had been heavily involved in campaigns were selected. We used information from newspapers and conversations with informed observers to make these selections. Special attention was paid to open seats, districts where challengers defeated incumbents or where it seemed likely that activist groups would have endorsed certain candidates. Thirteen districts in New Jersey and thirty-one districts in Virginia met these requirements for our population of districts where the issue might be important. Within these districts, we interviewed 43 New Jersey General Assembly candidates and 47 House of Delegates candidates. This was 82% of the New Jersey population and 76% of the Virginia population.

We conducted most of these interviews (which averaged between 45 minutes and one hour) in-person, although a few were conducted by phone. In addition, 17 New Jersey and 14 Virginia high-level gubernatorial campaign activists, party activists, and activists from the pro-choice and pro-life groups completed interviews. These interviews were usually 45 minutes to one hour in length as well.

All interviews were completed between December 1989 and April 1990. The 121 interviews were taped with the permission of the respondents and were "on the record" unless the respondent requested that they not be. The interviews were unstructured. For the most part, they were conducted as conversations, touching on the required topics as they arose. Coders, using content analysis, coded the legislative candidates' transcripts on 85 variables. During the training process, care was taken to maximize inter-coder reliability.

Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, we decided neither to reveal the names of interviewees nor to attach names to their on the record quotes. Relevant descriptors are attached to the quotes.

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[2]In the New Jersey districts, the districts had the following sample sizes: 366 in the 6th; 350 in the 10th; 350 in the 13th; and, 351 in the 30th. The Virginia legislative district sample sizes were as follows: 336 in the 44th; 335 in the 46th; 351 in the 69th; and, 350 in the 78th.

## Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Index

Virginia and New Jersey voters were asked the following questions, which we used to construct this index:

*I'm going to read you several statements. After each statement, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with the statement:*

*The [New Jersey/Virginia] legislature should pass a law requiring minors to obtain parental consent before they can have an abortion.*

*The state should fund abortions for women who otherwise cannot afford them.*

*The government should pass laws giving more rights to the [unborn/fetus] and fewer rights to the pregnant women.*

*The decision to have an abortion is a private matter that should be left to the woman to decide without government intervention.*

*Abortion is morally wrong.*

*Abortion should be prohibited under all or almost all circumstances.*

*Abortion should be allowed if another child would be a severe economic hardship for the family.*

## ALLOCATION OF VOTERS

The polling problems that plagued the Virginia gubernatorial race have received so much attention that they require a special mention here. Many observers believe that voters claimed they would vote for Wilder when speaking to pollsters, but chose in the privacy of the voting booth not to cast a ballot for a Black candidate. As previously stated, our survey initially seemed to have the same problems of other pre-election polls, that of overestimating Governor Wilder's lead. However, when we used relevant political questions to allocate to Wilder and Coleman the voters who declined to express a candidate preference (either responding "don't know" or refusing to answer the question), the results corresponded closely to the actual election outcome. Nineteen percent of Virginia voters interviewed either replied that they did not know for whom they would vote and that they were not leaning toward either candidate, or they refused to indicate which candidate they would support.

Among respondents expressing vote intentions, one of the stronger correlates of vote choice was the respondent's attitudes about the Martin Luther King holiday. Only about one in five who strongly agreed that the holiday was a good idea expressed an intention to vote for Marshall Coleman, while only about one in five who disagreed with the holiday planned to vote for Wilder. Hence, those who expressed no candidate preference and who disagreed with the statement that the holiday was a good idea were assigned to Coleman.

Given the observations of Black interviewers during de-briefings, white respondents who were interviewed by Black interviewers and agreed only somewhat that the Martin Luther King holiday was a good idea, were assigned to Coleman. Remaining respondents expressing an unfavorable impression of civil rights groups were assigned to Coleman.

Remaining non-allocated respondents were assigned to the candidate they saw as closer to them on more issues they deemed important. Those still remaining were assigned by political ideology, with liberals and leaning liberals going to Wilder and conservatives and leaning conservatives going to Coleman. Those voters not yet allocated who named only abortion as an important issue in the gubernatorial race were assigned to the candidate they perceived to be closer to their own stand on the issue. Then Republican respondents went to Coleman and Democratic respondents went to Wilder.

Only 19 "don't knows" or "refusals" (or 2% of the Virginia sample) could not be assigned to one of the candidates using this allocation method. About three out of every four voters allocated went to Coleman. The profile of voter preferences (50.6% for Wilder and 49.4% for Coleman) resulting from this *a priori* assignment was almost identical to the actual outcome of the election (50.1% for Wilder and 49.7% for Coleman), giving us confidence in the quality of our polling in this very enigmatic race.

The New Jersey allocation procedure was identical with the exception being that the race questions were excluded. About half of the allocated voters went to Courter and about half to Florio. As in the case of Virginia, our allocated results (62.3% for Florio and 37.7% for Courter) were quite similar to the election outcome (61.2% for Florio and 37.2% for Courter).

## NUMBER OF CASES

The following are the number of cases for each of the graphs in this report. The reader should be aware that in some cases when the entire sample is used for analysis, item non-response means that the number of observations for analysis is slightly less than the number of cases in the entire sample.

| | NJ | VA |
|---|---|---|
| **Figure 1-1** | n=799 | n=774 |
| **Figure 1-2** | n=798 | n=739 |
| **Figure 1-3** | | |
| 0 | n=75 | n=70 |
| 1 | n=57 | n=82 |
| 2 | n=60 | n=68 |
| 3 | n=75 | n=80 |
| 4 | n=100 | n=119 |
| 5 | n=151 | n=124 |
| 6 | n=171 | n=132 |
| 7 | n=110 | n=64 |
| **Figure 1-4** | n=800 | n=790 |
| **Figure 1-5a** | | |
| Favor | n=208 | n=205 |
| Oppose | n=526 | n=453 |
| **Figure 1-5b** | n=374 | n=461 |
| **Figure 1-6** | | |
| Men | n=409 | n=385 |
| Women | n=393 | n=405 |
| **Figure 1-7** | | |
| Men 18-34 | n=154 | n=105 |
| 35-49 | n=117 | n=134 |
| 50+ | n=130 | n=135 |
| Women 18-34 | n=110 | n=102 |
| 35-49 | n=131 | n=132 |
| 50+ | n=127 | n=159 |
| **Figure 1-8a** | | |
| Favor | n=99 | n=125 |
| Oppose | n=199 | n=176 |
| **Figure 1-8b** | | |
| Favor | n=82 | n=52 |
| Oppose | n=260 | n=203 |

| Figure 1-9a | NJ | VA |
|---|---|---|
| All | n=332 | n=343 |
| Very Important | n=[illegible]1 | n=192 |

| Figure 1-9b | NJ | VA |
|---|---|---|
| All | n=363 | n=295 |
| Very Important | n=180 | n=189 |

| Figure 1-10 | NJ | VA |
|---|---|---|
| 0 | n=75 | n=70 |
| 1 | n=57 | n=82 |
| 2 | n=60 | n=68 |
| 3 | n=75 | n=80 |
| 4 | n=100 | n=119 |
| 5 | n=151 | n=124 |
| 6 | n=171 | n=132 |
| 7 | n=110 | n=64 |

| Figure 1-11 | NJ | VA |
|---|---|---|
| | n=797 | n=781 |

| Figure 1-12 | NJ | | VA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Drugs | n=800 | Drugs | n=797 |
| Car Ins. | n=800 | Crime | n=798 |
| Environment | n=800 | Taxes | n=798 |
| Taxes | n=800 | Abortion | n=790 |
| State's Econ. | n=800 | | |
| Abortion | n=800 | | |

| Figure 1-13 | NJ | VA |
|---|---|---|
| *Pro-Life Groups* | | |
| 0 | n=74 | n=69 |
| 1 | n=57 | n=76 |
| 2 | n=59 | n=64 |
| 3 | n=75 | n=79 |
| 4 | n=100 | n=115 |
| 5 | n=150 | n=122 |
| 6 | n=171 | n=131 |
| 7 | n=110 | n=63 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Pro-Choice Groups* | | |
| 0 | n=75 | n=69 |
| 1 | n=56 | n=81 |
| 2 | n=60 | n=63 |
| 3 | n=75 | n=77 |
| 4 | n=100 | n=114 |
| 5 | n=150 | n=123 |
| 6 | n=171 | n=130 |
| 7 | n=110 | n=63 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Figure 2-1** | **NJ** | **VA** |
| | n=800 | n=800 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Figure 2-2a** | **NJ** | **VA** |
| Favor | n=208 | n=205 |
| Oppose | n=526 | n=453 |
| DK | n=66 | n=116 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Figure 2-2b** | **NJ** | **VA** |
| | n=162 | n=302 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Figure 2-3** | **NJ** | **VA** |
| Men | n=403 | n=391 |
| Women | n=399 | n=410 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Figure 2-4** | **NJ** | **VA** |
| | n=100 | n=179 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Figure 2-5** | | **VA** |
| | Southerner | n=519 |
| | Non-Southerner | n=255 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Figure 2-6** | | **VA** |
| | *All* | |
| | Southerner | n=537 |
| | Non-Southerner | n=265 |
| | *Favor* | |
| | Southerner | n=143 |
| | Non-Southerner | n=62 |
| | *Oppose* | |
| | Southerner | n=282 |
| | Non-Southerner | n=171 |

| **Figure 2-7** | **NJ** | **VA** |
|---|---|---|
| *Favor* | | |
| Catholic | n=136 | n=38 |
| Protestant | n=47 | n=147 |
| *Oppose* | | |
| Catholic | n=237 | n=70 |
| Protestant | n=146 | n=328 |

| **Figure 2-8** | **NJ** | **VA** |
|---|---|---|
| *Frequent* | | |
| Favor | n=121 | n=113 |
| Oppose | n=135 | n=153 |
| *Less Frequent* | | |
| Favor | n=87 | n=92 |
| Oppose | n=390 | n=300 |

| **Figure 2-9** | **NJ** | **VA** |
|---|---|---|
| High School or Less | n=295 | n=295 |
| Some College | n=202 | n=244 |
| College Grad | n=301 | n=253 |

| **Figure 2-10** | **NJ** | **VA** |
|---|---|---|
| 18-34 | n=265 | n=209 |
| 35-49 | n=250 | n=267 |
| 50+ | n=265 | n=300 |

| **Figure 2-11** | | **NJ** | **VA** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Men | 18-34 | n=154 | n=107 |
| | 35-49 | n=119 | n=134 |
| | 50+ | n=133 | n=137 |
| Women | 18-34 | n=112 | n=102 |
| | 35-49 | n=131 | n=133 |
| | 50+ | n=132 | n=163 |

| **Figure 2-12** | **NJ** | **VA** |
|---|---|---|
| *Democrat Favor* | | |
| Men | n=36 | n=24 |
| Women | n=45 | n=29 |
| *Democrat Oppose* | | |
| Men | n=121 | n=101 |
| Women | n=139 | n=102 |
| *Republican Favor* | | |
| Men | n=55 | n=54 |
| Women | n=45 | n=71 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Republican Oppose* | | | |
| Men | n=115 | | n=90 |
| Women | n=88 | | n=86 |
| **Figure 2-13** | **NJ** | | **VA** |
| All | n=332 | | n=343 |
| Cite Issue | n=60 | | n=132 |
| **Figure 2-14** | **NJ** | | **VA** |
| All | n=363 | | n=295 |
| Cite Issue | n=83 | | n=123 |
| **Figure 2-15** | **NJ** | | **VA** |
| Least 1 | n=174 | | n=199 |
| 2 | n=211 | | n=192 |
| 3 | n=227 | | n=214 |
| Most 4 | n=185 | | n=134 |
| **Figure 2-16** | **NJ** | | **VA** |
| Florio | n=800 | Wilder | n=776 |
| Courter | n=800 | Coleman | n=775 |
| **Figure 2-17** | **NJ** | | **VA** |
| | n=797 | | n=757 |
| **Figure 2-18** | **NJ** | | **VA** |
| 0 | n=75 | | n=66 |
| 1 | n=57 | | n=79 |
| 2 | n=60 | | n=63 |
| 3 | n=75 | | n=77 |
| 4 | n=99 | | n=114 |
| 5 | n=149 | | n=121 |
| 6 | n=171 | | n=127 |
| 7 | n=110 | | n=63 |
| **Figure 2-19** | | | **VA** |
| | | | n=396 |
| **Figure 2-20** | | | **VA** |
| | | | n=387 |
| **Figure 2-21** | **NJ** | | |
| | n=467 | | |

**Figure 2-22**

| | NJ |
|---|---|
| | n=282 |

**Figure 2-23**

| | NJ | VA |
|---|---|---|
| Differ. P-L | n=40 | n=66 |
| Non-Differ. P-L | n=143 | n=113 |
| Differ. P-C | n=115 | n=197 |
| Non-Differ. P-C | n=362 | n=210 |
| Uncertain | n=58 | n=105 |

**Figure 2-24**

| | VA |
|---|---|
| *Cite Issue* | |
| Differ. P-L | n=29 |
| Non-Differ. P-L | n=53 |
| Differ. P-C | n=104 |
| Non-Differ. P-C | n=70 |
| Uncertain | n=24 |
| *Didn't Cite Issue* | |
| Differ. P-L | n=37 |
| Non-Differ. P-L | n=60 |
| Differ. P-C | n=93 |
| Non-Differ. P-C | n=140 |
| Uncertain | n=81 |

**Figure 2-25**

| | NJ |
|---|---|
| *Cite Issue* | |
| Differ. P-L | n=9 |
| Non-Differ. P-L | n=20 |
| Differ. P-C | n=41 |
| Non-Differ. P-C | n=63 |
| Uncertain | n=4 |
| *Didn't Cite Issue* | |
| Differ. P-L | n=31 |
| Non-Differ. P-L | n=123 |
| Differ. P-C | n=74 |
| Non-Differ. P-C | n=298 |
| Uncertain | n=53 |

**Figure 2-26**

| | VA |
|---|---|
| *Democrat* | |
| Differ. P-L | n=9 |
| Non-Differ. P-L | n=37 |
| Differ. P-C | n=94 |
| Non-Differ. P-C | n=89 |
| Uncertain | n=40 |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Republican* | |
| Differ. P-L | n=54 |
| Non-Differ.P-L | n=56 |
| Differ. P-C | n=69 |
| Non-Differ. P-C | n=89 |
| Uncertain | n=42 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Figure 2-27** | **NJ** | |
| *Democrat* | | |
| Differ. P-L | n=9 | |
| Non-Differ. P-L | n=62 | |
| Differ. P-C | n=67 | |
| Non-Differ. P-C | n=174 | |
| Uncertain | n=19 | |
| *Republican* | | |
| Differ. P-L | n=30 | |
| Non-Differ. P-L | n=63 | |
| Differ. P-C | n=43 | |
| Non-Differ. P-C | n=144 | |
| Uncertain | n=27 | |
| **Figure 3-1** | **NJ** n=800 | **VA** n=800 |
| **Figure 3-2** | **NJ** n=366 | |
| **Figure 3-3** | | **VA** n=336 |
| **Figure 3-4** | | **VA** n=350 |
| **Figure 3-5** | **NJ** n=350 | |
| **Figure 3-6** | **NJ** | **VA** |
| Democrat | n=798 | n=772 |
| Republican | n=799 | n=776 |
| **Figure 3-7** | **NJ** n=349 | |
| **Figure 3-8** | **NJ** n=365 | |

**Figure 3-9**

**Figure 3-10**

# ELECTION 1989:
# THE ABORTION ISSUE IN
# NEW JERSEY AND VIRGINIA

*The New Jersey gubernatorial campaign...along with Virginia...were the first two campaigns post-Webster.... The environment and the issue were dramatically changed with the Supreme Court decision.... They were proving grounds, they were tests, case studies. The candidates were guinea pigs on what you can do that will help you win elections, how you can deal with the abortion issue that will help you win elections and how you can deal with it poorly that will not help you. (New Jersey campaign activist)*

*In an election [when] you lose by 7,000 votes, you point to anything as a decisive point.... If the Webster decision had not come down we would have won that election. (Virginia campaign activist)*

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*Election 1989: The Abortion Issue in New Jersey and Virginia*, provides evidence that the abortion issue affected campaign dynamics and voting decisions in both of these post-*Webster* gubernatorial races. While the 1989 legislative races show little evidence that these lower level elections are referenda, they do suggest that the abortion issue can sway election outcomes in close contests, can affect campaign dynamics, and can mobilize activists and campaign resources. Report findings have important implications for other states holding elections in 1990 and beyond.

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